THE AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL

AUGUST 1, 1952

Registered at G.P.O., Melbourne, for transmission by post as a newspaper.

ONE SHILLING

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The Australian Journal

Australia's National Monthly Magazine

First Published September, 1865

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Memory and Observation.
Qld., 2nd Jan., '52.—One of my aims was to pass a qualifying examination, and this I have done with credit. My memory and powers of observation have developed tremendously. I have acquired habits of study and industry and pleasure that have proved immeasurably beneficial. — QH.3100, Police Officer.

No More Frustrations.
Vic., 18th Feb., '52.—One of the most important things is that I know where I am going. No more day dreams and frustrations.
—VW.2768, Chief Radio Officer.

The Answer to Problems.
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NZI.356, Farmer

No Frittering of Time.
Vic., 11th March, '52.—I find myself able to concentrate on the important things first without frittering away my time as I used to do. I have a firmer and clearer grasp of my work and feel much better physically.
—VB.3751. Assist. Superintendent.

Beaten Inferiority Trouble.
Vic., 17th Jan., '52.—I can definitely say that I have rid myself of inferiority trouble. My whole outlook has broadened and I can face the future with courage. — VMc.1635. Textile Cadet.

So Practical.
Qld., 24th March, '52.—I have made progress beyond all my hopes . . . every sentence and idea in the Course is so practical, once you get started. — QG.1826, Inspector.

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W. Aust., 18th March, '52.—I have gained a knowledge of the functioning of the mind. Also my memory and interest have improved. I have more courage and patience and a much better job than prior to the Course. — WS.3250. Fitter and Turner.

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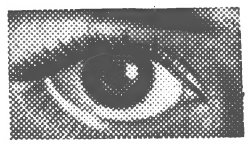

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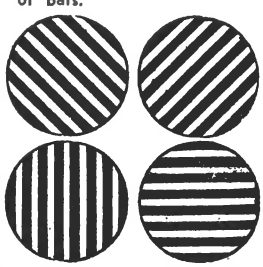

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Among the Critics

Half a Century and no Complaints.

"Faultless" (Vic.): I have been a reader of the "A.J." for over 50 years and cannot find any fault with it so far. I don't like every story. No magazine could be SO wonderful as to please with every tale. I am just reading "Museum at Night," it's all right, but a bit too long. Same applied to the "White South." I felt sad and lonely when the "Drovers' Road" stories finished. It seemed as if I'd lost a dear friend. I hope "Little Babe" never grows up. I like your old-time stories, they seem so clean; modern stories always have too many home cocktail bars, especially in England where a friend of mine had to pay £3/10/- a bottle for whisky. Cannot tell you what he said. I like the Arabian Night yarns, also "The Kitten Sphinx." "Wilders Walk Away" was a poser. What became of the treasure? Never mind what adverse critics say, they don't mean it. Keep the "A.J." as it is, Mr. Ed.

Who Remembers This Story?

D.L.M. (N.S.W.): Congratulations on the continued success of the good old Journal — ever my favourite. Some time ago you published what I thought was one of the best stories I had ever read in your "mag." Can't remember the title, but it was by A. Sinclair. A most charming story of a grandfather and little granddaughter purporting to be pedlars, and roping in a young man called "Zachary." They were three personalities to be remembered. Do wish you could get more stories by that writer. Always glad to see Dale Collins' name under a title. Would like, too, to make a special mention of Dorothy Eden. I have never read a story by her that I have not found thoroughly enjoyable.

Borrowed Characters.

E.L.J. (W.A.): I have just read a story in the Journal for May that surprises me not a little. The story is "The Elephant's Child," by Francis Gerard, who has borrowed characters created by Edgar Wallace in his "Sanders of the River" and "Bones." To say the least, it shows considerable lack of imagination and bad taste on the part of the author that he had to use the characters first thought of by another writer now dead. The law of copyright in Australia must be different to other countries, I suppose, or Mr. Gerard would never have done it. I will not comment on the merits or otherwise of the story, except to say that it is not up to the standard of the original "Sanders."

G.S. (Q'ld.): Adventure stories should at least be feasible. Francis Gerard's poor attempt at imitating Edgar Wallace's "Sanders of the River" is not even that. To use the characters complete with names, of characters made famous by a great author may be legal, but it is rather contemptible nevertheless. A writer worthy of the name should create his own characters.

Probably our two correspondents missed the editorial note introducing the "Sanders" stories, in which it was explained that Mr. Gerard, who was a friend of the late Edgar Wallace, and knows the "Sanders" country intimately, took over the characters with the full approval of Mrs. Wallace and the Wallace family, so that the question of copyright does not enter into the matter.

Whether the stories are up to the original Wallace standard is, of course, a matter of taste. Many people have been unable to detect any difference between the two writers, while Mrs. Wallace herself likes them as well as those written by her late husband.

It is not unusual for one writer to adopt characters invented by another. Gerald Fairlie, for instance, now writes the "Bulldog Drummond" stories at the special request of the late "Sapper" (Major McNeil), while the adventures of "The Three Musketeers" were continued by another hand after the death of their creator, Alexandre Dumas, although not, we are bound to say, with very great success.

Many a book, left incomplete on the death of the author, has been finished by someone else. This happened with Charles Dickens' last novel, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," but the most notable example we can think of is R. L. Stevenson's "St Ives," the final quarter of which was written by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who matched his style so well to that of the original that, unless the break were indicated, it is quite impossible to tell the point at which death forced the great R.L.S. to drop his pen.

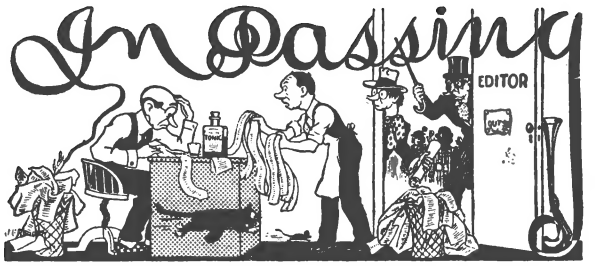
A Naval Note.

W.G. (N.S.W.): I well remember reading the first story of J. E. Macdonnell in the Journal—printed, I think, about the middle of the war. I continued to read his further appearances with interest. Now, I'm glad to see, after a lapse of many years, you have printed another of his vivid naval yarns. I was in the wartime Navy, and have found that the main ingredient of Macdonnell's stories is their authenticity. They certainly take me back. Any chance of some more?

That, of course, depends on the author!

A Grand Story.

J.F.G. (N.S.W.): I am writing to say I am very sorry to see the end of "The Young Pretender," by Barbara Cartland. What a grand story! I, by a bit of good fortune, found a book of "The Glass Spear," by Sidney Hobson Courtier, and I'm quite thrilled. "Sindbad and the Old Man of the Sea," and "Father and I Were Ranchers," by Ralph Moody, O.K. with me. Well it certainly is a fine Journal, good, clean and it's reasonable in price when you look around and see what is sold over here for 1/6 and 2/- on a weekly and monthly basis. It will do me for good reading.



HAVE you noticed the gradual disappearance of the people who used to be known as "characters"? At one time—not so very long ago, either—every township in Australia possessed at least one odd individual who refused to conform to the normal either in appearance or behaviour. We don't mean that unfortunate type, the town drunkard, who is more or less always with us, but the amiable eccentric, whose dress and habits set him apart from his fellows, and made him a noticeable figure.

Such people, of course, were by no means confined to the country; every city had its quota. We can recall men who wore ancient dress suits and top hats at all hours of the day; others who pored over learned-looking tomes as they pushed through the crowds; others again who distributed pamphlets advocating some mysterious cults of which they claimed to be the originators.

We recall one very dignified old gentleman, bearded like a patriarch, who was never seen without two suitcases, which he guarded as if they held the crown jewels, but which on his death proved to contain nothing more valuable than rolled-up newspapers. Another veteran haunted second-hand shops and markets, buying all sorts of entirely useless things, which he carried home to his room and never looked at again. When he died, the government authorities took over his affairs, and found that for years he had been sleeping on a pile of unopened parcels three feet high.

There seems to be a dearth of such people nowadays. Gone is the man who, having bought a gross of straw "boater" hats at some time during his career, wore them, summer or winter, for the rest of his life. Gone, too, are the pavement artists and street musicians, together with the vendors of fountain pens that wouldn't write, safety razors that would do everything but shave, and stain removers which removed the fabric as well as the stain. The new generation knows as little of them as it does of the celebrated "Jubilee" Juggins, who, after returning from the races, always threw all the small change in his pocket out of his hotel window, to the great delight of the crowd below.

On a higher level than the mere characters were the celebrities. You could usually tell a celebrity in those days, because he looked like one. There was, for instance, no mistaking an actor; everything about him, from his profile to his cane, gloves and spats advertised him like a neon sign, and when on cold days he donned his fur-collared overcoat, the picture was complete.

We have a photograph of H. B. Irving taken when he was in Australia forty years ago. Disdaining the conventional attire of the period as altogether too prosaic, Mr. Irving affected a long frock coat and an immense sombrero, from beneath which his hair descended in luxuriant waves to his shoulders. No one could have mistaken him for anything else but a distinguished tragedian.

On the other hand, we had lunch recently with three present-day actors, two being London stars and the third an Australian just returned from a successful trip abroad. Alas, there was not a pair of spats among the three of them; all wore grey slacks and tweed jackets, and looked exactly like a hundred thousand others. They did not even call for oysters and champagne, but devoured a sandwich and a cup of tea apiece before bolting for the theatre.

Musicians have travelled along the same standardised road. In the days of Paderewski, one could immediately recognise an eminent musician by his flowing locks and tremendous bow tie, but now even the greatest of them wear ordinary neckwear, and few of them seem to have any hair at all.

Poets and authors, of course, are quite hopeless. We simply don't know one writer, either of verse or prose, who wouldn't pass for a car salesman. Artists still put up a fight, but their hearts are obviously not in the unequal struggle, and most of them look like bankers, and leave beards and baggy corduroy trousers to a few self-conscious beginners, who feel that they can disguise their lack of skill under a set of ginger whiskers.

These random reflections are inspired by a letter from Mrs. D. C.. a Victorian reader, who was interested in Frank Rhoden's article on the Murrumbidgee whalers, which appeared in our April issue.

"One piece," she writes, "was about 'Overcoat Charlie.' Well, Overcoat Charlie or his double lives not far from us. He has never been seen without his overcoat on. Hot or cold, he still wears it. Last summer, when the temperature was well over 100 degrees, he was seen riding his bike several miles away, and still wearing his overcoat. Some of the neighbours say he sleeps in it. He rides a bike everywhere, and going along the road one can hear him arguing with himself. So annoyed does he get that he often swears at himself. He never works, nor does he draw a pension. He must have more brains than his neighbours! Do you think he could possibly be 'Overcoat Charlie'?"

We doubt it. Mr. Rhoden's article described life along the Murrumbidgee as it was in his boyhood, so long ago that there is little possibility of any of the characters he described being still around. Mrs. D. C.'s overcoated neighbour is merely one of the last representatives of a vanishing race.

Classics.

We have often been asked to reprint stories which appeared in early issues of the "Australian Journal," but reluctantly decided against doing so because fashions change in literature as in clothes, and few stories will carry over from one generation to another. The suggestion, however, set us thinking, because we know that although the average story of one period seems rather flat to the reader of half a century later, there are many stories of such universal and timeless appeal that the passing of the years means nothing to them.

Finding such stories is a little like digging for buried treasure or searching for petroleum. We knew, for instance, that in addition to his novels, Charles Dickens had written many short stories, but where were they to be found now, hidden away, as they

(Please turn to page 80)

A WATCHDOG

who gives bite for bite,

A dog who seldom barks at night,

Who comes when called and goes when told,

Is more than worth his weight in gold.

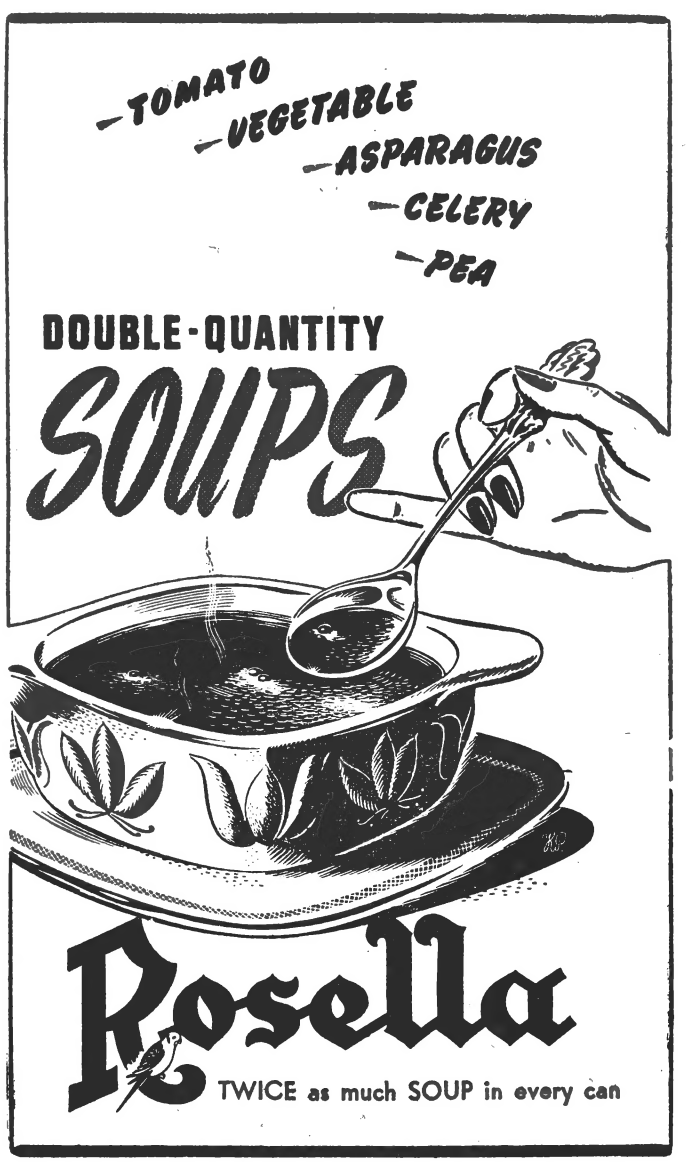
The remedy for coughs and chills,

That every expectation fills,

Must be efficient, fresh and pure,

And that is

Woods' Great Peppermint Cure.



The Night of the Storm

By Rex Grayson

I

TO work in Mr. Harley Craven's office was to be unofficially dead. Soundproof windows baffled the tumult of the streets, heavy carpets swallowed legal secrets almost before they were uttered. These precautions were to spare the nerves of Mr. Craven, who, if he had any, hid them in a frame more active and robust than that of most men nearing sixty. This, according to him, was entirely due to his excellent habit of abandoning office cares promptly at four o'clock every Friday to spend the week-end at his shack at Benmore Bay, where he read Oriental philosophy and sunbaked in refreshing solitude. Monday returned him to town, bronzed and brisk.

Small, dark and dainty, Gina Antony sat behind the counter in the reception room, strumming on an outsize in noiseless typewriters. She paused only when a client asked to see Mr. Craven; when Mr. Paulus crept furtively out with a new batch of work, or when, as now, Miss Meadows stopped for a chat.

"Of course, the blue ones are the rarest," Miss Meadows declared. "Some of them are enormous. Imagine it—nearly four inches across! Mr. Craven was telling me that he has seen even bigger ones in the bush near his place at Benmore Bay. You come from the country, Gina. Do you remember seeing any? Look!"

Running through the pages of her book she stopped at a coloured plate.

"Butterflies!" said Gina.

"Of course they're butterflies," said Miss Meadows, impatiently. "What do you think I was talking about?"

"New Zealand stamps," confessed Gina.

"I wish to goodness you'd listen. You don't seem to have any concentration. It is these novels you read. They sap the brain. I told you last week I'd given up philately. An outdoor hobby is so much healthier. Anyway, it is too hard to get stamps, so I sold my album for seven and sixpence. Butterflies are much better. All you need is a net and some chloroform."

"Why chloroform?"

"To kill them. It is painless, you know."

"It seems a shame."

Back in 1942, something very strange had happened in the old house at Benmore Bay. History might easily have repeated itself ten years later.

"In the interests of science," asserted Miss Meadows. "The birds will get them if you don't. Nature again—red in tooth and claw! You must come out with me on Saturday, Gina. The exercise will do you good."

TWO years in Sydney had made Gina cautious. Miss Meadows had already lured her into a play-reading circle and an amateur ballet society, each time to resign and leave her stranded in a wilderness of culture. Miss Meadows was so close to forty that for anyone else the situation might have been perilous, but — as with Mr. Craven—the years retreated in confusion before her vigour and optimism. She took Mr. Craven's dictation—and how he loved to dictate!—with the flourish of the virtuoso, while to the younger girl fell the drudgery of deciphering Mr. Paulus' crabbed hand, and making copies of endless documents as dreary as that gentleman himself. Miss Meadows was bright, but difficult to keep up with. One week it was Yogi, the next bird-watching. Now, apparently, it was butterflies.

"Of course you'll need a bicycle." Gina was delighted. She had no bicycle. Miss Meadows remained unperturbed. "I'll borrow one for you. That is fixed, then. We'll take the service car to Benmore and ride out from there. I know Charlie, the driver. He'll fix the bikes on the back of the car for us. Next Saturday, then."

Gina made one last feeble bid for liberty.

"What if it isn't fine."

"It will be." Miss Meadows had the air of one who commands the elements. "I've studied the chart."

MR. PAULUS slid through the door. He was tall and cadaverous, with sad pale-green eyes and hair which had been reduced to a wisp over each ear and one rugged tuft above his forehead. Two wholemeal scones and a glass of milk had been his standard lunch for years, but it never seemed to agree with him.

"Two-fifteen!" He ostentatiously produced his watch. "Don't let me interfere with your conversation, ladies. As I have often mentioned before, work in this office is of no consequence whatever."

He catfooted away to his own office.

"Old beast," said Gina, though without feeling. At twenty-two, the opinions of such men as Mr. Paulus do not really matter.

"Take no notice of him," advised Miss Meadows. "He's not so important round here."

"I sometimes think the poor man must be ill."

"He works too hard. He always was a little odd, and when his son was killed it seemed to finish him."

"I didn't know. In the war?"

"Malaya," said Miss Meadows. "I'll leave the book with you, Gina. It'll do you more good than those boy-meets-girl things you're always reading. Boy-meets-girl—boy-loses-girl — boys-gets-girl! Pah! Take care of it. It belongs to a gentleman friend."

Once more Gina applied herself to her typewriter. The door opened again and, thinking Mr. Craven himself had returned from lunch, she was glad he would find her at work and not studying the butterfly book. A cough and an "Excuse me!" corrected this theory. She looked up at the young man smiling across the counter.

"Sorry I broke the thread. Mr. Craven—is he in?"

Gina produced the "Have you an appointment" formula.

"Appointment? No. If I had I wouldn't ask if he was in — I'd expect to find him here. Ireland's the name—J. F. Ireland. He'll see me, I shouldn't wonder."

"He isn't back from lunch," confessed Gina.

"A man after my own heart." J. F. Ireland's smile broadened. "Twelve to three?"

"Certainly not," said Gina primly. It was an axiom that the boss was always on the job. "He must have been delayed. Could you see Mr. Paulus? He's the confidential clerk."

"Ah," said J. F. Ireland, reflectively. Apparently the name meant something to him. "Mr. Paulus! I could. I think perhaps I might. But later on. First things first. I'll wait for Mr. Craven. At the moment time has no meaning. May I take it that smoking is permitted?"

He filled his pipe and turned over the pages of the butterfly book. Gina, her fingers dancing on the keys, wondered who and what he was, not merely because he was a good-looking young man, but because there was something about J. F. Ireland that made you wonder. He seemed too cheeful to be any sort of defendant, not worried enough for a plaintiff; much too attractive for either, even though his face was a shade careworn for his years. His clothes, good though far from new, hung loosely on him.

"Hyacinthus Giganteus!"

The sudden exclamation stopped Gina in the middle of one of Mr. Paulus' most illegible sentences. J. F. Ireland pointed with the stem of his pipe.

"Excuse my Latin. That's what they call the big blue fellow, isn't it. I remember them when I was a boy. We used to see them in the hills near the coast. My father told me they were scarcely ever found anywhere else. Odd, that. He collected practically everything in his time —except money. Butterflies! He had them by the thousand. He chased them with a net, like one of those chaps you see in the comic strips. Poor old chap! He died while I was away."

A whirlwind gathered along the corridor. Gina recognised the portents.

"Here's Mr. Craven now."

J. F. Ireland closed the book and knocked out his pipe in the ashtray in time to arrest Mr. Craven as he burst in like a man pursuing a lost half-hour. The lawyer's predecessors had been grave and fleshy men. They drank port, dressed in broadcloth, and spoke in soothing tones, punctuating their clients' halting confessions with an occasional dry "Quite so" or "Precisely." Breaking with tradition, Mr. Craven affected geniality, fitness and sonorous tweeds.

"Ireland? J. F. Ireland? What, not Mr. John's son?" His brown clean-shaven face broke into a broad smile. "Well, this is a pleasure." He shook hands cordially, and then stood back to examine his visitor. "Yes. The resemblance is certainly there. I feel I have met you before. A little thinner than your father, perhaps, but you'll fill out."

"They run to slimness where I've been."

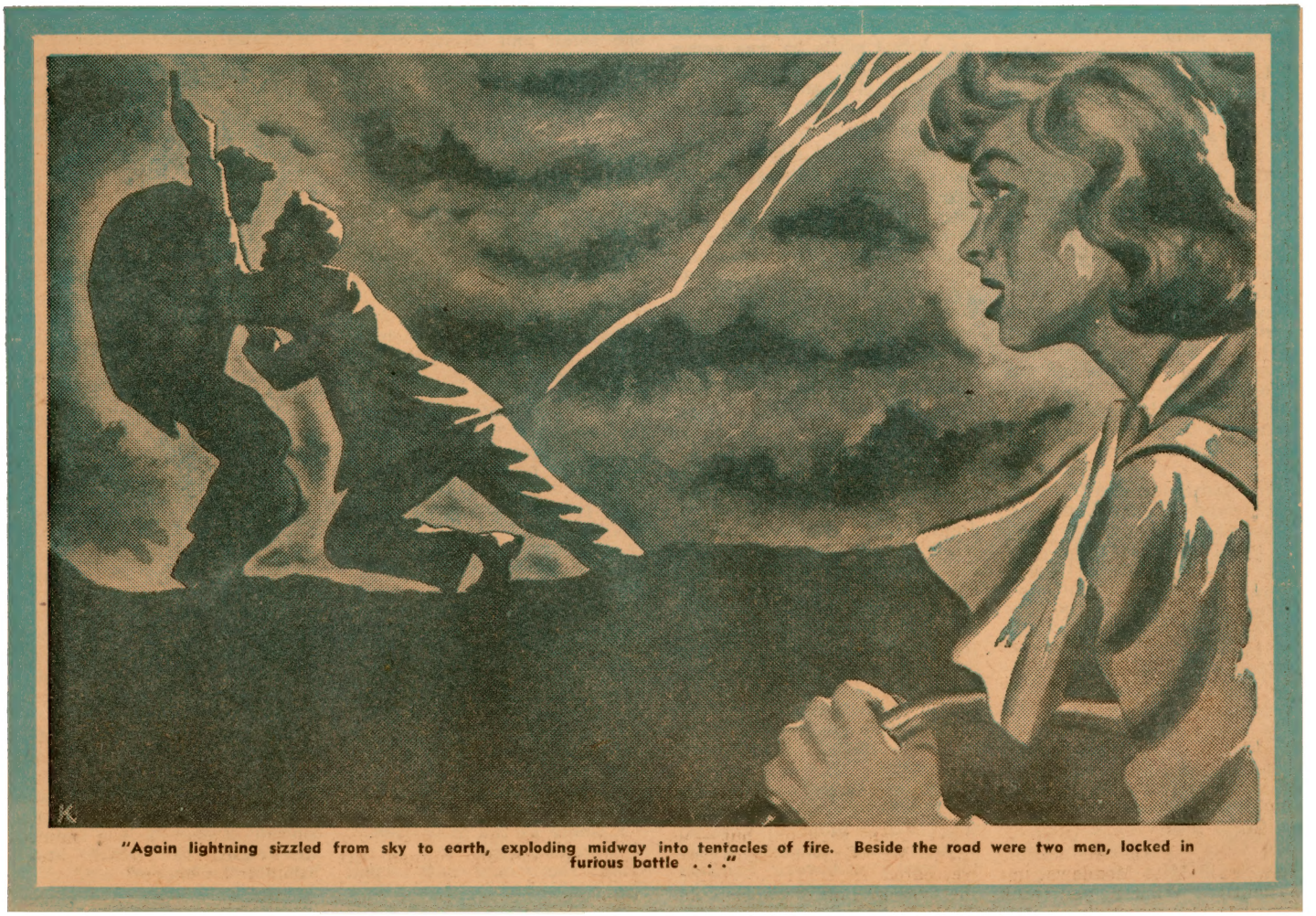
"So I understood. You must have had a shocking time." He took J. F. Ireland by the arm. "Come along, my boy. I'm very anxious to have a talk to you."

THEY vanished into Mr. Craven's private room. Ten minutes afterwards, the buzzer summoned Gina. She found the room filled with smoke, the men leaning back in their chairs, Mr. Craven delivering one of his orations.

"... Brutal and treacherous. That's how I summed them up from the start, and I flatter myself that few people know the Japanese mind better than I. I spent several months with them in 1938, and studied the people closer than most. To my view . . . Oh, yes, Miss Antony, would you mind asking Mr. Paulus for the Ireland file?"

Gina tapped on Mr. Paulus' door and waited for the reluctant "Come in." As usual he was sprawled over his desk, an untidy hand-rolled cigarette drooping from his lips, his glasses askew on his nose, while he pencilled hieroglyphics in the margin of some closely typed documents.

"Yes, Miss Antony, what is it?" Mr. Paulus did not like the interruptions. He had been born out of his period, thought Gina. He should have lived in the Middle Ages, when he could have retreated to a monastery to spend his undis-



"Again lightning sizzled from sky to earth, exploding midway into tentacles of fire. Beside the road were two men, locked in furious battle . . ."

turbed lifetime illuminating some endless manuscripts. "The Ireland file? What on earth does he want that for?"

"I couldn't say. There's a Mr. Ireland with him now."

"Mr. Ireland?" Paulus' tone was incredulous. He straightened his glasses. Behind them, the pale-green eyes glittered with an unusual excitement, although his expression remained as lifeless as an empty stage.

"Are you sure?"

"He said that was his name, J. F. Ireland."

"J.F.," said Mr. Paulus. "The son. So he's back. You saw him?"

"Yes, Mr. Paulus."

"Did he ask for me, by any chance?"

"Not exactly. I understood him to say he might see you later."

Mr. Paulus dug the point of his pencil into the blotter until it snapped.

"Before he leaves, kindly tell him that I should like to get in touch with him. Please don't forget to ask for his address." He added, as if revealing some fantastic secret. "He has been a prisoner-of-war. His late father was a friend of mine."

THAT struck Gina as odd. If it was hard to believe that Mr. Paulus ever had a son, it was harder to imagine him with friends. Or, for that matter, enemies. He seemed as insulated from the world as a clam. Did he, then, have an existence apart from the office in which he drudged like some clerkly survival of the eighteenth century? He returned from the strong room bearing a black tin box, his mask-like face looking even greyer than usual, but the curious glitter still fired the eyes behind the blurred glasses. It was the first time Gina had seen them show any sign of life.

"We had a common interest, Mr. Ireland and I. Chess."

She could imagine him playing chess. It was the only game that would suit his patience.

Gina took the black box into Mr. Craven's office. He was still talking.

"It was a great shock to me. We were neighbours in a sense, even though I didn't know your father very well, except in a professional capacity. Actually it was through my clerk, Mr. Paulus, that he became my client. Do you know Paulus?"

To Gina's surprise Ireland shook his head.

"Curious fellow, Paulus. Lives his own life."

"So did my father." Ireland's glance went from Craven to Gina. She felt that at any moment he might smile at her, and she would like him to, though not here. She set the box on the table.

"Thank you, Miss Antony. That is all."

MISS MEADOWS was chasing imaginary butterflies round her cubby hole with a net.

"Just practising," she explained. "Though I really think that there is a blowfly somewhere. What's on your mind?"

"Ireland," said Gina.

"Forever!" responded Miss Meadows. "Are you testing my reactions or something?"

"J. F. Ireland. He's in with Mr. Craven, now."

"The Ireland estate, I suppose." Miss Meadows brought down an imaginary butterfly in the net and put it away. When a man was mentioned, she had two standard questions. "How old is he? Is he married?" She asked them now.

"How should I know? He doesn't look either. Mr. Paulus said he'd been a prisoner-of-war."

"That's right. So he was. I remember now. His father was killed while he was away and left a lot of debts and an old white elephant of a house at Benmore Bay. We'll see it on Saturday."

"Killed?" said Gina.

"Accidently. It is all in the press cuttings book. I remember it particularly, because it was just about the time we had the Japanese submarines in the Harbour. You weren't here, then, Gina, were you? Remind me to get some chloroform on the way home."

Gina looked out the ponderous press cuttings book for 1942, and ran down the story under the date of June 1. With the world on fire, the papers had little space for the death of one lonely old man. She learned that the body of John Ireland had been found in front of his house near Benmore Bay. Apparently he had fallen from the tower which surmounted the old family mansion, for the window in the tower was open, and the spouting over the carriage portico had been broken away. There was, indeed, the latent suggestion of suicide, but the coroner's verdict had been misadventure.

Ireland had not occupied the house for some years, preferring to live alone in a small cottage some distance away. He was a widower. Mention had been made of a son who had been taken prisoner, and a daughter married to a British naval officer and living in England. The story finished, obviously crowded out by the big news of the moment.

J. F. IRELAND, came from Mr. Craven's office. They shook hands at the door.

"Good-bye for the present. If you're writing to your sister, tell her I'll be able to finalise matters very soon now you are back again. At the same time, don't arouse any false hopes."

"She knows there's nothing much in it. Anyway, what there is, is hers. They probably need it more than I do."

"Very generous of you, my boy," said Mr. Craven, approvingly.

Ireland's hat still lay on the counter. It was one of those one-man hats which look grotesque on any other head than that of the owner. He knocked it even more out of shape before putting it on. Glancing at Gina, he wondered what she would say if he told her that, during the years of filth and horror that had passed, his spirit had been held taut by the belief that some day he would again see just such a girl. How well she fitted into his dream of someone small and dainty with a grave sweet face and steady eyes ready to dance with mischief. You had to know a girl well to tell her that—or did you? He had almost forgotten . . .

"Mr. Ireland!"

He broke through his reverie with a start.

"Mr. Paulus asked me to give you a message. He said he would get in touch with you later."

"Thank you." Ireland's expression changed. A moment before he had looked the boy he had been in 1939. Now the subtle curtain of years came down again. "Yes, I must see Mr. Paulus. You don't mind giving him my address? I believe I forgot to tell Mr. Craven. I'm staying with some friends at Darling Point. Shall I write it down for you? The J.F. stands for John Faraday. By the way, I shan't be there at the weekend, though. He'd better telephone me before then. Here's the number."

He pushed a slip of paper across and added, "Mr. Craven said I was to ring Miss Antony if I wanted to make another appointment with him. You're Miss Antony, aren't you? You won't forget who I am when I ring?"

A smile lit the grey eyes.

"I won't forget."

No, she would not forget. She could hardly say, "Ring soon, John Ireland, and come again quickly, because I think I like you." The butterfly book still lay open at *Hyacinthus Giganteus*. Ireland picked it up.

"There were blue butterflies near our prison camp," he said. Time lifted its cold hand from him once more. "But not like that. One flew in at the window once when I lay ill, and it made me think I was a boy at home in the old days."

Mr. Craven's buzzer had been ringing intermittently. Now it broke into a long continuous note of impatience. She would have to take back the file.

"So long," said J. F. Ireland, and raised his hand in a little friendly gesture of parting.

CYCLING, easy to muscular legs like those of Miss Meadows, is easier still on a road running smoothly downhill all the way; but few roads do. This, for instance, was not only rough but seemed to consist of a series of sharp descents, followed by long, heavy pulls, while Gina's legs, not to be faulted on the score of symmetry, were ill-adapted to driving a pair of creaking wheels against the clock. Miss Meadows, that vigorous enthusiast, had been left a mile or more behind, battling with pump and tools, and apostrophising a flat tyre in terms that would have sounded scandalous indeed in the office of Mr. Harley Craven, but were lamentably inadequate in current circumstances. Night had caught up with them, a storm was drifting from seaward and they had caught no blue butterflies.

Gina's orders were to push on, and by threats, cajolery, or by mere supplication to persuade the driver of the service car to wait for her companion — a matter, according to her optimistic calculations, of twenty minutes. If Charlie proved unyielding, there remained no alternative but to ride all the way to the city. As an aid to speed, Miss Meadows had directed Gina along a short cut which paralleled the coast instead of making a loop inland along the main road. The map claimed that this saved a mile, but it had been drawn without reference to ruts, hills or unaccustomed legs.

She laboured to the top of a rise, the beam of the headlamp weaving drunkenly through the darkness and almost blacking out as she slowed down. Half a mile to the right, the ocean burst against the base of high cliffs in a continuous cannonade. The black sky pressed heavily

down. A rivulet of perspiration trickled along Gina's spine, to be joined, like the Amazon, by a thousand tributaries. The strap of her haversack chafed her shoulder. It was lighter by two meals than at starting, but it still contained an empty vacuum flask, together with the collecting bottles and other gear of an amateur entomologist, entrusted to her by her enthusiastic friend, who herself carried the net.

Lightning scrawled its electric signature across the clouds, throwing into momentary relief the clump of pines a little to the right of the road. Rising among them was an enormous old house surmounted by a tower. Gina recognised it at once. That morning, as they rode out, Miss Meadows had told her it was the old Ireland home. Further along, hidden in a hollow, was Mr. Craven's week-end shack, where, presumably, that gentleman was even now refreshing himself in solitary communion with Nature.

The booming thunder made Gina's skin prickle. Wondering what could present a better target to a lightning flash than a girl on a bicycle, she plugged to the top of a hill. The next flash gave her another glimpse of the big house among the pines. Would J. F. Ireland live there again, or was it, as Miss Meadows claimed, merely a white elephant fed for thirty years on borrowed money?

Again lightning sizzled from sky to earth, exploding midway into a myriad of wavering tentacles of fire. Beside the road stood two men, locked in furious battle, and showing against the glare like wrestling figures cut from a black cardboard. A cry of pain or fear was lost in a long roll of thunder. A point of red flame gashed the ensuing darkness. Gina heard the sharp crack of a shot. There was another staccato report before the lightning blazed again, and now the road was empty except for the body lying in the hollow of the road.

The bicycle wobbled beneath her like a sick thing and fell with a clang. The dynamo-fed headlamp yellowed and went out, while Gina sprawled on the dusty road, the gravel tearing at her outstretched hands and bare knees. She lay there for a moment, and then rose unsteadily, her heart pounding, the blood roaring in her ears. This is no good, she told herself vaguely. You can't just stand there. Whatever has happened, you must not be a coward.

The heavens flared again, the thunder followed, peal falling on peal. Gina felt the sudden spatter of rain. Then she heard a rustle in the scrub fringing the road — a rustle that was neither rain nor rising wind. *He's coming,* she thought. *He saw me, and he's coming. What shall I do?*

The big house. It was less than two hundred yards away. There would be safety there—and help. Abandoning the bicycle, she ran for the fence and scrambled over, pushing through the straggling hedge beyond. The air quivered with thunder as she raced for the trees, and raindrops pattered like bullets on the parched ground. Behind her the fence wires twanged as her unseen pursuer battled with them, but if he still followed, the sound of his footsteps was lost in the storm.

It seemed more secure amid the trees. These pines muffled even the thunder, and her tread fell noiselessly on the thick mat of fallen needles. She ran through the belt, and there beyond the cleared space which had once been lawn and garden, the house loomed up, vast and old and dark. Gina made for the carriage portico that straddled the weed-grown driveway, reaching its shelter to crouch for a moment, breathless and trembling, expecting that each succeeding flash would reveal the assassin as he stepped noiselessly from the pines. Then, turning, she started to beat on the heavy door with her clenched fists. Within, the echoes merged with each other like shouts in a series of caves.

THE storm centre was passing over the house. Lightning played in continuous flame. The rain fell like a barrage of silver spears between the buildings and the trees. If he came now she would be trapped in the entrance beyond hope. Still no one answered her frantic knocks. Was, then, the house still empty? In her terror she had not thought of that. Or were those within able to hear nothing but the cannonade of thunder? She would try the rear. Slipping from the shelter of the portico she ran round the leeward side of the house, pausing to hammer vainly at the side door.

At the back, the house dwindled away into added outbuildings, but the whole place seemed as silent and tenantless as a rifled tomb. Each burst of lightning made the windows shine in ghostly rows, but none possessed life of its own. The rain poured down, cascading from blocked spouts and leaking waterpipes. Gina fled for shelter and, as she turned the corner, ran straight into the arms of a man.

Her cry of horror died in her dry throat. She tried to beat him off, but he caught her wrist firmly with one hand and flashed the torch on with the other.

"Miss Antony! What are you doing here?"

Momentarily, Gina went limp, but Mr. Craven held her firmly, talking in the brisk, practical, but slightly exasperated tones he reserved for clients whose affairs, though involved, were not beyond redemption.

"Come, come, my girl, this won't do. You know who I am, don't you? There's nothing to be frightened about—nothing whatever. The storm can't hurt you. Nor will I. Stop these hysterics, please."

"I'm not hysterical."

"Then kindly control yourself," said Mr. Craven, severely. "Good heavens, you're not a baby! What's a little thunder?"

"It isn't the thunder," she retorted, angered by his tone as much as she was relieved by his familiar presence. "Mr. Craven, something dreadful has happened."

"Has it?" Mr. Craven sounded sceptical. "All right, all right! You can tell me all about it in a minute. But not out here, if you please. I'm nearly drenched."

"But listen, Mr. Craven . . ."

"One thing at a time, Miss Antony." Mr. Craven transferred the torch to his left hand and fished out a bunch of keys. "There's nothing to be gained by all this ridiculous excitement."

"But you must understand. A man has been shot . . ."

"What," he said sharply. "What nonsense is this? Who has been shot and where?"

"On the road . . . I don't know who it was . . ."

Mr. Craven became terse. "My dear young woman, try to pull yourself together. You realise how incoherent all this is. One would almost think you had been dreaming." He walked to the side door and inserted the key in the lock. "Come in out of the rain."

"But I tell you . . ."

"Kindly act reasonably. I can listen just as well inside as out here. I'm wet enough as it is. So are you, probably. I refuse to discuss anything in this deluge."

Creaking, the door swung back allowing the torch to reveal an empty vestibule, off which a couple of rooms opened. Straight ahead a dark passage led deeper into the house. Mr. Craven closed the door and shook the water from his hat.

"Now, Miss Antony, you can let me hear what you have to say. Please be explicit. Remember, I don't even know why you're wandering about here in the first place."

His abruptness had a tonic quality like an icy shower. They might have been in the office, discussing the question of posting a letter, so curtly matter-of-fact was his manner. Briefly she told him of the butterfly-hunting expedition, of Miss Meadows' mishap, what she had seen on the road, and how she had fled from an invisible pursuer.

Mr. Craven did not laugh, but he was, not very politely, incredulous.

"If you were anyone else, Miss Antony, I'd put this all down to hallucination, but you've never struck me as the nervous type. Still, it's quite easy to be a victim of one's own imagination."

"It was not imagination."

"We'll soon find out if there is anything in what you say," he retorted. "Please give yourself no further concern. There is nothing whatever to be alarmed about. If there has been any trouble, it is scarcely necessary to tell you that I am quite capable of dealing with it. But I'm certainly of the opinion that you're suffering from delusion. This house belongs to a client of mine, and I usually have a look round during the week-end. I saw no one about as I walked across. However, we'll know when the rain eases off a little."

He took a cigarette from his case and then, thrusting the torch under his arm, flipped his lighter into flame. The torch slipped and fell to the floor. Gina retrieved it. Until then she had seen him dimly in the light reflected back from the dusty walls. Now, the white beam revealed him with brilliant clarity. This was not the Harley Craven she knew so well at the office. This was another Craven altogether—a man with bloodless lips and hard, cruel eyes —a man with a dark patch of blood on the sleeve of his sodden tweed coat.

Her cry rose above the drumming rain.

"You!"

Mr. Craven snapped out the lighter, let fall his cigarette, and snatched the torch from her hand.

"Close your mouth," he said venomously. "Stop that, you little fool!"

She knew then that she was alone in the house with a tiger.

(Please turn to page 30)

Without Let or Hindrance

By DOROTHY EDEN

THAT evening Adam read the letter aloud in his precise voice.

"My Dear Adam,

I have decided to stay down here for another month, the weather is good and I am getting some satisfactory fishing. I have, however, given permission to my niece to use the cottage for that month. She has lost her husband fairly recently, and the change will be good for her. Under the terms of my lease I find I have a legitimate right to do this, but courtesy demands that I also inform you of my plans. I can assure you that your privacy will be in no way disturbed.

Yours sincerely,

Godfrey Blakiston.

P.S.—How is the book going? Don't get too many goddesses in your hair, my boy!"

"A widow lady! Lands sakes!" murmured Mrs. Smythe, who always listened to everything that went on in the house, and instantly formed her own quaint melodramatic ideas. The house of a Greek scholar was too quiet for a person like Mrs. Smythe. She had to live on her not inconsiderable imagination.

Adam looked at her under his heavy brows.

"A widow, Mrs. Smythe, isn't always of the calibre of musical comedy."

"Will you agree to this proposition, Adam?" demanded Aunt Hepzie.

"I have no alternative," replied her nephew. "There are words in the lease 'without let or hindrance' and I must observe them."

"Would they be applying to the cases of widow ladies?" murmured Mrs. Smythe incorrigibly.

"Will having a strange woman for so close a neighbour upset the progress of your book?" asked Aunt Hepzie practically.

Adam gave the question his deliberate consideration.

"I imagine, since the lady is in mourning, we will see or hear very little of her. If, however, by a peculiar chance (and I can't imagine this, seeing she is old Blakiston's niece), she is a noisy or disturbing person, one must remember the Greeks coped not unsuccessfully with their sirens, too."

"Then the matter is settled," said Aunt Hepzie.

"Sirens!" muttered Mrs. Smythe. "Coo!"

Her voice was wistful. She retreated to the kitchen, taking with her a dream of a slanted-eyed creature, half woman, half mermaid, sitting on a pointed rock playing a harp. There was something vaguely wrong with that picture, she felt. But whatever sirens were like, it would be a very good thing if one walked in the door this minute. Stir things up, remind Mr. Adam he was a man, not just a set of muscles and cells that held a pen and produced profound thoughts.

Aunt Hepzie, because of her great age, climbed the stairs to her room very slowly. A widow drenched in tears would be no person to take Adam out of himself. He was becoming a recluse.

ADAM shut himself in his study and sat contentedly at his desk that was a mass of manuscript and reference books. He looked at the clock, At one he would go to bed. He had already forgotten about the prospective tenant of the cottage that stood at the bottom of his garden, separated by only a low privet hedge, and approached by the narrow drive that ran past his own house, beneath his study window.

But just before one o'clock as he was on the verge of completion of the chapter on Greek mythology, he thought he heard a faint unearthly singing.

> The ancient Greeks were no doubt very interesting, but that is no reason why a handsome young man should think of nothing else, particularly when there is a pretty girl around, even if she might be a flighty widow with a family.

Unfortunately, the matter did not end with the evidence, real or imaginary, of his ears. The next morning he was interrupted in his study by Mrs. Smythe dragging in Aristotle by the collar. An interruption while he was at work was strictly forbidden. Adam sat back in his chair and looked at Mrs. Smythe in mild disapproval.

"Sirens!" exclaimed Mrs. Smythe. "Look there, sir, what Aristotle brought home."

She held out a chewed and draggled scrap of satin and fur that Adam believed was called a mule, the sort of thing women, some women, wore about the house. Aristotle smiled and waved his plumed tail.

"Well!" said Adam, rather helplessly. "It will have to be returned."

"That's right, sir."

"Is the — er — widow there already?"

"She is, sir." Mrs. Smythe's face was avid with interest. "She must have come last night. She seems quiet enough, but she's subtle, sir. Ah, subtle's the word. Sending Aristotle home with this" —she waved the piece of footwear — "that I suppose is meant to be a bedroom slipper. It's a billet doux, sir, that's what it is."

"Now that," said Adam, "is sheer imagination. Aristotle has found this himself."

"Then it was left where he would pick it up, sir," Mrs. Smythe insisted stubbornly. "Anyway, you'll have to return it and apologise to the poor lady."

"I?" said Adam, startled.

"Who else, sir? It's your dog."

Sometimes Mrs. Smythe was downright impertinent. But her logic was undefeatable. The neighbourly thing to do was to return the slipper and apologise for his dog's behaviour. Adam sighed in exasperation. But when his devious brain could find no escape from a situation, he faced it at once. Accordingly he ran his fingers through his untidy black hair, picked up the draggled slipper, called to Aristotle, and set off.

When visiting old Blakiston to have one of their interminable discussions on the respective merits of the Greek poets, Adam was used to stepping his long legs over the privet hedge at the bottom of the garden and walking unceremoniously in at the back door of the cottage. Now, however, he went decorously through the front gate and up the neat gravel path.

Adam was not acquainted with any women recently widowed, indeed with scarcely any women at all. He had a

vague picture in his mind of Medea tearing her hair and sobbing imprecations against fate, and nothing could have left him less prepared for the lassoo that was suddenly flung skilfully round his waist, imprisoning his arms and jerking him off his feet. He went down with a crash into the dahlias bordering the path, his hat fell over his eyes, and Aristotle set his feathered forepaws on his chest and barked in joyful excitement. The hoots and yells of boys joined Aristotle's barking. Adam threshed his long legs and muttered imprecations.

A WOMAN'S voice sounded above the noise of the yelling savages.

"James! Alexander! You horrible creatures!"

The hat was lifted off Adam's face and a large red dahlia momentarily suffocated him. He thrust his head violently aside and saw the girl bending over him, struggling with the tightly pulled rope. She had fair curls tied on top of her head with a red ribbon. Indeed, they were so close to his face that one of them tickled his nose. The nape of her neck was young and tender, like a child's.

She was muttering under her breath, "Those *terrible* twins! I'm so sorry! The trouble is, they're so awfully *good* with this contraption. There, now you can get up."

She held out her hand to help him up, and turned her face to him.

Her voice of apology may have been sincere, but there was no doubt at all that she was laughing at him. Her mouth was solemn, but her clear blue eyes were full of irrepressible mirth.

Adam had spent the last ten years of his life (when he thought of women at all) in contemplation of the Greek goddesses. He didn't like modern women. They lacked dignity and depth. He especially disliked them when he was the subject of their amusement.

Seeing this scrap of a girl, who was supposed to have the dignity of widowhood on her fair head, laughing at him, he lost his temper. He groped among the crushed dahlias, found the frivolous scrap of a slipper that he had had in his hand, thrust it towards her and said coldly:

"I was merely returning your property which my dog——"

He looked round and saw that Aristotle had vanished. There was suddenly violent barking from the other end of the garden, then two small boys with ragged feather headdresses appeared. One of them was patting Aristotle's head and Aristotle's traitorous tail was waving madly.

"Nora, look at the dog!"

"Isn't he a beauty! He's a retriever."

"No, he's not; he's an Irish setter."

Their shrill young voices were innocent and unashamed. The girl called to them. "James! Alexander! Come here at once and apologise for this dreadful behaviour."

The boys looked at Adam brushing dahlia petals off his coat, began to giggle and ducked behind the bushes. Nora flung out her hands.

"Really! They're quite uncontrollable. It's not badness, but just these awful high spirits."

"Their apology is your business," Adam said stiffly. "I have no further interest in the matter." He whistled for Aristotle, who came reluctantly, leaving the game that appealed to the whole of his canine heart.

"Now you are angry," said the girl ruefully. "You're Mr. Collier, aren't you? I was afraid you might not like children."

"I have never had occasion to dislike children. As long as they don't disturb me, I assure you I won't disturb you. Good day, Mrs——"

He hesitated. No one had told him this woman's name.

"Call me Nora like the children do," she said in her friendly voice. "And thank you for returning my property."

"The girl bent over him, struggling with the rope . . ."

"GOOD gracious, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Smythe. "What have you been doing? You're all dust and leaves."

Mrs. Smythe's sharp inquisitive eyes fell before Adam's angry disapproval.

"I'll get a brush and brush you down," she murmured.

She did so, quickly and expertly, and without uttering another word. But Adam could see that her self-control was like a dam on the point of bursting. Serve her right, it was time she learnt to mind her own business. He submitted impatiently to the brushing down, then stalked off towards his study. There, he stood within the open door and listened to Mrs. Smythe bustling busily to the dining-room where Aunt Hepzie would be sitting before the fire with her knitting.

"Gracious to goodness, Miss Collier!" he heard her exclaiming in her twittering sparrow-gossip voice, "that widow lady, she knocked Mr. Adam down!"

Adam began to draft a letter to his old friend and tenant, Mr. Blakiston, whom one would have expected to have more sense.

Dear Blakiston,

I received your letter yesterday. I am prepared to allow your niece, who has arrived, to remain in the cottage because of a clause in the lease which states "without let or hindrance," but I feel a little hurt that you did not make the whole situation clear to me. You neglected to tell me that she is the mother of twin boys who are at the most unmanageable age, if indeed they have ever been managed. Any damage resulting to my property I feel in fairness should be——

He stopped, his pen arrested above the paper. There was a sound of wheels on gravel passing the window, and the footsteps and chatter of children.

He stood up to look out. He saw the fair-haired young woman, still hatless, still with the frivolous red ribbon in her curls, pushing a baby carriage. The two boys followed, swooping about the baby carriage like puppies.

A vision of days rent with the shrieks of young hoodlums and nights disturbed by a baby's crying rose before him. Really, old Blakiston had been incredibly thoughtless. And he had made no explanation as to how a woman recently widowed could look so young, so gay, so light-hearted.

Adam's pen hovered indignantly over the half-finished letter. He was seeing himself helpless in the dahlias while the girl laughed at him.

. . . a charge against you, he wrote. *Your niece is too young and empty-headed. She ties her hair with a ribbon, like a child . . .*

Adam looked in amazement at what his scholarly pen had produced. Abruptly he tore the letter in two and threw it on the fire. He was behaving in a manner that would make him seem not much older than old Blakiston's niece, Nora.

ARISTOTLE was tied up to keep him out of mischief, but later in the day Mrs. Smythe burst unceremoniously into Adam's study with the cat, Hebe, in her arms. On each of her four paws was neatly fitted a half walnut shell. She was stiff with fear and indignation.

"There's two young ruffians of boys next door," Mrs. Smythe declared. "You didn't tell me the widow had children. They ought to be whipped for this. What are you going to do about it, sir?"

"I will whip them," Adam said. He gently eased the shells off Hebe's outraged paws.

Aunt Hepzie's dry old voice came from the doorway.

"When you were a boy, Adam, you had a particular pleasure in tying kittens' tails together. Whipping you didn't help. It's something to do with the dominant male."

Adam looked at her in vague astonishment.

"I'd forgotten that."

"You forget too much, Adam. You forget even the ancient Greeks must have had children who tormented lizards or something."

She tapped away on her sticks, and Adam said, almost childishly, "I haven't been able to work all day, Mrs. Smythe. And there's that lecture for the Athenian Club that we're discussing tomorrow. You remember Professor Birtton and Professor Mackay are coming to lunch?"

"I do," Mrs. Smythe said briefly. "And they won't approve of widow ladies, sir. Nor of sirens, neither!"

One other thing remained to outrage Adam that night. At eleven-thirty, just as he was thinking of packing up and going to bed, a car stopped in the drive beneath his study window. He heard a girl laughing merrily. Then there were low good nights, the car door slammed, and the gate leading to the cottage clicked open and shut.

So Nora fitted into Mrs. Smythe's category of musical-comedy widows, after all. Already she was leaving her children and blithely going out at nights. He listened until a few minutes later other footsteps, probably those of the baby-sitter, came out, and the car went away. Later still he heard that faint sweet singing again.

PROFESSOR BIRTTON was from the British Museum. Professor Mackay was an Oxford don. It was impressive enough that they should take time off to lunch with Adam who was nearly thirty years their junior. They regarded him as extremely promising and were interested in his opinions and theories. The talk would be good. Adam had looked forward to it for some time.

They were having an animated discussion on Jowett's translation of Plato when the shrieks began.

Mrs. Smythe was the first into the dining-room.

"It's those boys, sir. They're drowning in the goldfish pond!"

Adam dropped his knife and fork and sprang up, followed by his two guests. The goldfish pond was perhaps just deep enough to drown a small boy. Judging from the shrieks coming from the garden, life was far from extinct, but Adam wasted no time in reaching the scene of the disaster.

One small boy was standing on the edge of the pond weeping vociferously. The other, clutching at lily leaves and gasping with fright, was tethered in the mud in the middle of the pond. His yellow hair hung in streaks round his anguished face, the water just lapped his chin.

With two strides Adam was in the pond and yanking the child out. The mud sucked round his good brogues. The water was extremely cold, and smelt. The goldfish, if they had survived this adventure, were well out of sight.

"We were trying to catch a fish and he fell in," the small boy on the bank was explaining, his tears stopped and his little red face shining with relief.

"Which one are you?" Adam asked with deceptive pleasantness.

"I'm James. Alexander fell in."

Adam surveyed the miserable, trembling little creature whom he held by the shoulder.

"It doesn't matter, really, which of you is which, because you're both going to get something which I imagine has been very well earned for a very long time. Mrs. Smythe!"

Mrs. Smythe was hurrying across the lawn, followed by the two professors.

"Take these children. Dry Alexander and clean him up, and I'll see to them both later."

Mrs. Smythe led the two awed and apprehensive boys away. Professor Mackay said in his sharp, alert voice, "Your children, Mr. Collier? I wasn't aware that you were married."

"I'm not," said Adam. "And they're not my children."

"Ah, naturally not, in that case."

"Lively little youngsters, eh?" observed Professor Birtton. "A species quite necessary to the world." His voice was slightly wistful.

"I apologise to you gentlemen for ruining your lunch," Adam said. "We'll go back to the dining-room for coffee and liqueurs, and resume our discussion."

But the discussion, as well as the lunch, was ruined. The figures of ancient Greece seemed strangely lifeless and far-off and almost unimportant compared with the urgent necessity for punishing two very much alive boys and returning them to their mother.

Mrs. Smythe, it seemed, had as traitorous a heart as Aristotle. When Adam went to her to collect the boys she had them by the fire in the living-room telling them stories. Alexander was wrapped in Adam's own dressing gown, which flapped round him, making him a small scarecrow. James' face was now pink and relaxed.

Aunt Hepzie nodded in her chair, occasionally interrupting Mrs. Smythe.

"It was three bears, Mrs. Smythe, not just two. They had a baby, don't you remember?"

The little domestic scene stiffened as Adam came in. Women were soft, he thought angrily. His luncheon had been ruined, but the two despoilers of it were being treated like heroes.

"I'll take the boys home," he announced shortly.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Smythe, springing up. "I don't think Alexander can walk in that dressing gown. You'll have to carry him, sir."

Adam set his teeth. Then he swung the warm, nervous little body into his arms, and James scrambled up and followed. They were all entirely silent as they went across the garden and up the gravel path to the cottage.

THE girl opened the door. Her curls were tied with a blue ribbon to-day. It was the colour of her eyes. She had a plump pink-cheeked baby in her arms. It stared

at Adam with round blue eyes, then gave him a wide adoring smile.

"Oh!" Nora cried in alarm. "What's happened?"

Adam set Alexander down, a ridiculous figure in the flapping dressing gown.

"Neither of these two hellions is hurt, but both deserve to be," he said shortly. "I refrained from thrashing them. I will leave that to your discretion."

James tugged his coat timidly. "Nicky's smiling at you, Mr. Collier. She doesn't often, does she, Nora?"

Nora said in her soft, happy voice, "What he means, Mr. Collier, is that she doesn't often smile at strangers. But why is Alexander in that dressing gown?"

"He fell in the fishpond," James explained. Alexander dug his knuckles in his eyes and abruptly began to cry.

Nora thrust the baby into Adam's arms, and went down on her knees to Alexander.

"Poor darling! Poor little baby! Did you get an awful big fright? And kind Mr. Collier lent you his own dressing gown. Come and let's get some of your own clothes so he can have it back. You don't mind waiting a moment, do you, Mr. Collier?"

Adam shook his head dumbly. There he was standing with the gurgling smiling baby in his arms while the two ruffians, the two scapegoats, were pampered by their young and foolish mother.

One thing was certain, he would never tell Aunt Hepzie or Mrs. Smythe about that scene. Neither would he tell them how Nora came back for the baby and touched his hand lightly and said, "*Thank* you, Mr. Collier. Uncle always said you were a fine man, but he never told me how sweet you are. You really would have been well within your rights in thrashing those boys."

Sweet! thought Adam disgustedly. If a woman had to apply an adjective to him that was the last one he would have chosen. No doubt Nora used a similar adjective for the friend who brought her home at eleven-thirty or thereabouts each night. For these nocturnal outings continued regularly, and Adam found himself distracted from his work for the half-hour preceding Nora's return and the half-hour following the sound of her light gay good nights to her escort. In the daytime it was the irrepressible shouting and yelling of the two boys at play, and at night it was this stupid tense waiting for a scatterbrained woman's return. How could that scrap of a girl take her widowhood and her motherhood so lightly? In vain Adam turned to the unassailable stability and dignity of his Greek goddesses, but his peaceful work was being ruined. This kind of thing could not go on.

HE hesitated about writing to old Blakiston, however, just as some unsuspected softness in him had made him refrain from punishing the boys on the day of the fishpond incident. But on Saturday night, at the end of the first week, matters reached a climax.

Mrs. Smythe had gone to stay with her aged mother for the night. Aunt Hepzie was in bed and no doubt sound asleep. It was only Adam who heard the baby crying.

At first he sighed impatiently and hoped the far-off wail would soon stop. It didn't. It went on and on, increasing in volume and urgency.

He knew that Nora had gone out as usual. But surely she hadn't left the children quite unattended. Surely her lack of responsibility had not led her to those lengths.

Adam walked up and down his study willing himself not to hear the crying that was now reaching an agonised screeching. Half an hour went by. He was ignorant of the time an infant could safely be allowed to cry. It seemed to him that the child, that rather adorable soft little creature who had gurgled in his arms the other day, must be at the point of death from exhaustion. He could stand it no longer. He flung himself out of the house and over to the cottage.

The front door was unlocked. He opened it and went in. The house was filled with the sound of the baby's yells. It seemed that no one could be there and not hear them. But the woman asleep in the armchair by the fire was far from hearing them. One sniff of her breath was sufficient to tell Adam that. He looked disgustedly at the snoring figure, then hurried upstairs.

The instant he switched on the light in the bedroom the infant in the cot stopped crying, stared at him with her large swimming eyes, and smiled.

"Well!" said Adam in mingled relief and exasperation. "You little devil!"

The baby cooed and stretched up her plump arms. There was the patter of bare feet behind Adam. He turned sharply and saw the two pyjamaed figures.

"Oh, Mr. Collier, we're so glad you came." James had undoubtedly been suppressing tears himself, and Alexander was scarlet-cheeked with anxiety.

"Mrs. White won't wake up, and Nicky won't go to sleep," they further explained. "She's been screaming, and we can't sleep either."

"What's the matter with her?" Adam asked.

"Oh, I guess she just wants changing," Alexander said offhandedly.

"I'll show you where her napkins are," offered James.

"Where's your mother?" Adam asked sharply.

"You mean Nora? Mrs. White has her telephone number if anything awful happens. Is this awful enough, Mr. Collier?"

Adam looked at the pile of napkins in the cupboard which James had opened, and at the gurgling expectant infant.

"It is," he said briefly. "Where's that telephone number?"

THE moment he left the room the baby began to yell again. Through a gradually increasing volume of screams, and the helpful chatter of the twins, Adam dialled the requisite number, and when a voice sounded at the other end he said curtly, "I want to speak to Mrs. Blakiston, please."

"Mrs. Blakiston?" The uncomprehending voice made Adam almost panicky.

"Nora," he said wildly.

"Oh, Nora! Well, there's no need to shout like that."

"If you had a baby yelling in your ear you'd shout, too."

"Well, *just* a minute, please."

A few moments later there was Nora's own gay, laughing voice.

"Oh, Mr. *Collier*!" she exclaimed. "Nicky! Oh, I can hear her. What's wrong?"

"She requires changing," Adam shouted. "And your sitter is in a drunken stupor."

He heard the girl's gasp.

"Oh, dear! I wasn't sure whether I could trust her. My regular sitter couldn't come, and I simply had to take a chance. I'll be home in twenty minutes. Can you manage?"

"Standing on my head," said Adam bitterly.

He put down the telephone and returned upstairs to the screaming baby. James and Alexander twittered happily behind him.

"We'll show you how to fold them, Mr. Collier. It's easy as easy."

Strangely enough, it was as easy as easy. The twins looked at him admiringly and said, "Gee, Mr. Collier, have you got kids, too?" He had almost a thrill of achievement as he laid the clean and smiling baby back in her cot tucked her in, switched off the light, and heard her little sleepy murmurs of contentment.

Then he marshalled the boys back to their room.

"Into bed with you," he said.

They looked up at him with their large pure eyes.

"We *always* say our prayers first."

They knelt at their bedsides and there began a jumbled murmur.

"God bless Mummy and Uncle Godfrey and Nicky and Mrs. White and Mr. Collier——"

"Eh?" said Adam sharply.

James raised a sleepy eyelid.

"We always say that since you saved us from drowning."

"And because you didn't thrash us," added Alexander.

THE house was completely quiet when Nora arrived. She came running in breathlessly, flinging off her fur cape and crying, "Where are the children?"

"In bed asleep," Adam answered. "I hope. Well, I'll be going."

"No, no, don't go. I haven't even thanked you." Nora went to the living-room and looked distressfully at the unconscious woman in the chair by the dead fire. "Goodness, how awful! Now I won't know when I can trust anybody."

"You could, of course, try staying home in the evenings," Adam suggested.

Nora turned to face him. Her curls were ruffled, her blue eyes distressed. There was too much paint on her face, too. It antagonised Adam and made him more ruthless.

"It wouldn't be polite to tell you what I think of you, but it would be no more than you deserve."

She flushed deeply, he thought with anger, but when she raised her eyes again he saw that they were brimming with merriment. She was laughing at him again, the shameless hussy. Just as she had laughed at him when he lay tangled up in the dahlias, now she was laughing at him for what she no doubt considered were his strait-laced qualities.

"You wouldn't do that, Mr. Collier," she murmured. "No more than you would thrash the twins. Your heart's too soft, you're too sweet."

"Soft! Sweet!" Adam flung at her angrily. "You'll know about that when I give you notice to quit. I was sorry

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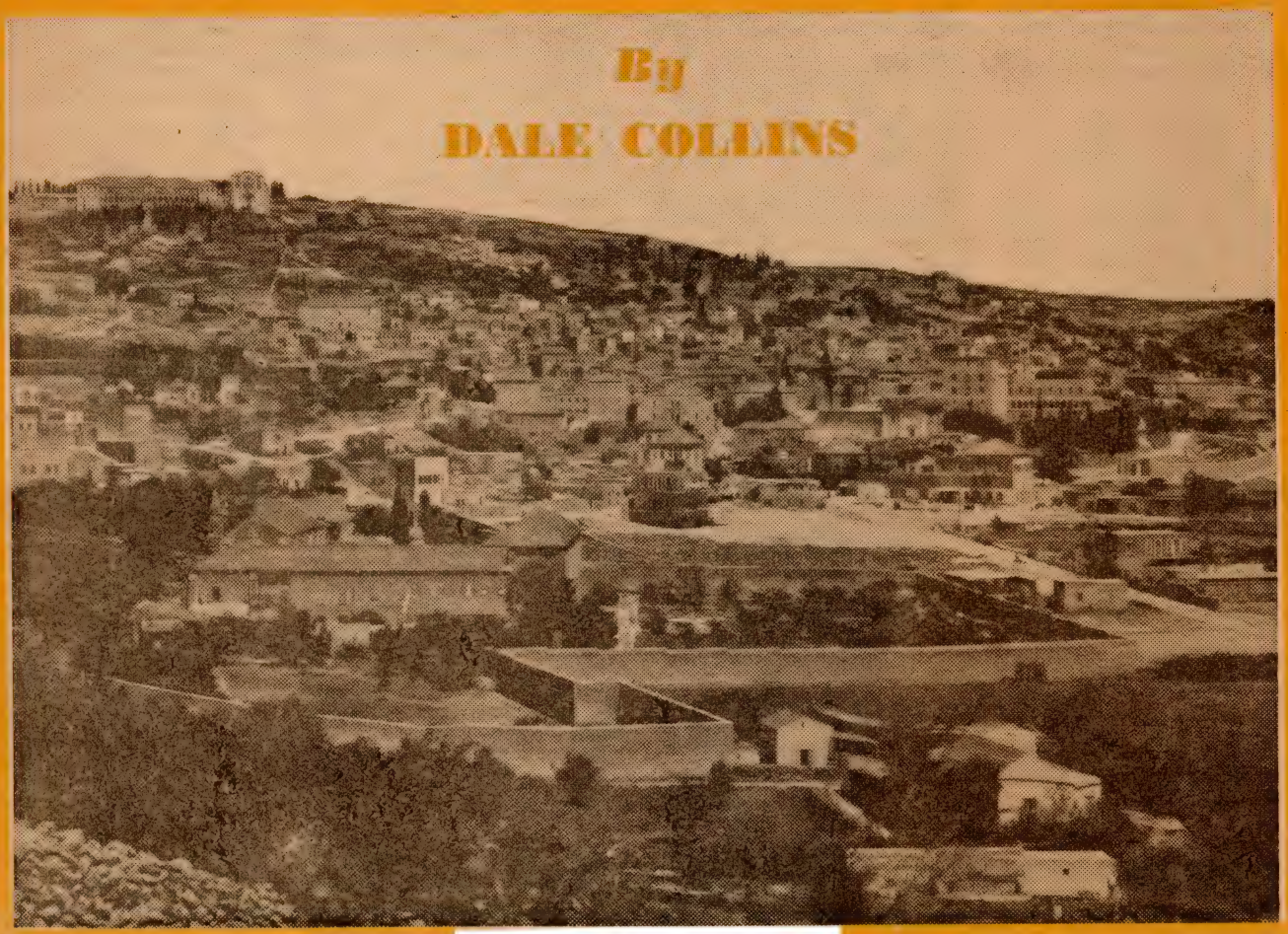
Beloved Thief

By
DALE COLLINS



Nazareth Today

BY the modest standards of those times and of the East—the very, very few wealthy beyond dreams, the many dwelling ever in peril of real starvation—Naomi's father was rich. He owned broad acres and flocks and olive trees and fruit orchards. These had not been come by easily, and the fight to gain them had made him and his wife a hard and grasping pair. Enough was not enough — the more they had, the more they wanted. Wealth, instead of giving enjoyment, became a drug, an obsession, not the means to live but the only purpose and meaning for existence.

In secret they lent to those in dire need, and their rates were more usurious and their dealings more ruthless than prevailed anywhere else in Israel, but the poor cannot afford to bargain.

This greed was as strange as it was ugly, since Naomi was their only child and there was already enough for the three without further grasping and striving.

As often happens, Naomi had everything she didn't want and nothing she did. Only another pampered, spoilt child? No, it went deeper than that.

Perhaps she should have been a son rather than a daughter, for, unlike other girls who were docile and obedient and content to be looked upon as rather inferior beings, there was much of the rebel in her. Though a very lovely and very feminine young person she craved adventure rather than security, freedom to shape her own life rather than to have it laid before her as a cut-and-dried pattern which she must follow. Her big, black eyes held dreams and unmaidenly ambitions. She carried her straight, firm body with the assurance of a queen.

"Rachel, Rachel," her father grumbled to his wife that night when Naomi, a thundercloud, silent and unhappy, had taken herself off to her room, "why should we suffer this misfortune? We are righteous and in good standing with the priests at the Temple and with our fellows. Yet our only child grows into one of these modern girls—restless, ungrateful, dissatisfied. There were not such in all the land when we were young. It is the evil of the times. Old values and sanities seem to have crumbled away."

"Ai-ee," mourned Rachel, "often I think she must be a changeling."

"We have slaved and moiled through the long years—and all for her. What is our reward?"

Rachel snapped finger and thumb to signify how little, and her sharp, keen nose came down to meet her nutcracker chin, the mouth between, bitter and thin.

Thus they complained together—speaking, they would have claimed, as fond but disappointed parents—finding no fault in themselves, as, in truth, is most often the way with people. Then he brought up the subject which rankled most of all.

"What can one make of her attitude towards this mar-

In which a noted Australian author tells the story, as it pictures itself in his imagination, of the man who escaped the doom of the Cross.

riage? Any girl would be down on her knees thanking the parents who could bring it about. Isaac is a good young man, and will make a husband in a million. He may not be handsome, but since when is it that happy marriages come about because the groom is as beautiful as one of the graven images of the pagans? Is he not the only son of a great merchant in Jerusalem whose wealth does not depend, as ours does, on the fickle seasons, but grows through good times and bad? Will he not bring her riches to more than equal the dowry we have given the years of our lives to provide? Are not these things very truth?"

"They are truth, husband. It is the perfect match. Rest well content in that."

"And what is our payment? A fling of the head and a scornful flash of the eye and a pouted lip, and hoity-hoity and thank you for nothing, since he is not the man of my choice! What should she know of men? How should she understand that which is proper and needful in a husband? Amongst our people these matters have always been the concern of older, wiser heads. So they must ever be. Where is wisdom in the hot blood of youth? I tell you, Rachel, I think the girls of to-day are out of their senses."

"It would seem so," she nodded. "Yes, indeed. But perhaps in the two weeks that remain she will see reason."

"I should like to think so. 'Honour thy father and thy mother!'—Bah! A pity that I didn't put her over my knee occasionally when she was younger. I could even wish to do so now, but perhaps it is too late."

Rachel smiled a crooked smile having no mirth in it.

"It is much too late. Also it is too late for us to be sitting here worrying about that ungrateful one. We must be up betimes, for Samuels comes with his interest or we foreclose. All will be well when she is Isaac's wife. Marriage can tame the most wilful maid and break the haughtiest spirit, slowly but surely, as water wears away the stone. We may yet find recompense in our grandchildren, who will be great in the land, having the wealth of our house and Isaac's."

"There is that. You are wise."

"Then repay my wisdom by dealing sharply with Samuels when he comes at dawn. Don't heed his tears or his talk of starving wife and children.

"Naomi forgot fears and dismay. She gazed at him, eager to learn what manner of man this was who behaved so strangely. . . ."

We helped him, but he would not help himself."

STRETCHED out on a mat in her own room, Naomi, that wilful, modern girl, hands clasped behind her head, gazed up into the darkness. She still wore her day clothes, for she knew that sleep would not come to her and the room seemed suffocating and prisoning as a cell.

That other cell which awaited her in Isaac's house would lack the single advantage of this one where, at least, she was alone.

Listening to the murmur of voices from the outer room, knowing they were discussing her and well able to guess what they were saying—she did not hate her parents, realising that, according to their own very queer lights, they had done, and were doing, their best for her. No hate, but a certain scorn which could have turned to pity save that her own destiny was too deeply involved.

"What's wrong with parents?" she asked the darkness, as many another girl has done. "All they think of is money! money! money! Isaac has money and so I must marry him. Had he all the wealth of Rome I wouldn't want him. He's a slimy toad, a horror; he's an unctuous, weak-kneed, brainless, chinless nincompoop." She shivered and beat the rug with her clenched fists. "Money! What happiness has all their frantic money-grubbing brought to them or me? What good will the money of Isaac and his father do me? Yet I am to be sold as if I were a fat sheep. 'Better a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred withal.' The prophet said that, didn't he? They are ready enough to quote the prophets to me when it suits their book, but when I gave them that one, they pursed their lips and said I knew no better, and that love would come and I'd be glad enough of the stalled ox into the bargain.

"Love will come—! Why do parents treat us as if we were idiots? It is true, that, caged and prisoned and shut away as I have been, I have had no chance to prove what my heart knows. What men have I met until the chosen Isaac was produced like a conjuror's timid coney? What chance have I ever had to meet the men there must be? But what am I to do? I am trapped in the snare of our narrow, conventional, stupid tribal way of life, which hasn't changed since Moses led us out of Egypt."

She heard her parents go to bed, and waited until she knew they would be asleep. Then, though it was an escape which was only an illusion of escape, she slipped out noiselessly.

The night was velvet black, though thronged with pulsing stars. A little breeze whispered among the trees. Otherwise all was quiet, all was peace. The world was untroubled by the pettiness and ugliness of humans, eliminated for a while by the little death of sleep.

Even Isaac had been snuffed out briefly, for, like a good and proper citizen, he believed in going to bed early. Going to bed? And a fortnight tonight—? Again she shivered, for it was as if a clammy, moist and evil hand had passed in the mockery of a caress over the virgin whiteness of her body.

Something must happen before that caress became reality something undreamt of in her wildest imaginings.

A nightbird called nearby and was answered from afar by its mate. Lucky feathered lovers, with the freedom of the skies and the gift of wings to take them swiftly and easily each to each for a meeting among the singing leaves, silken bodies nestling together.

She walked on, as she had a hundred times before when fleeing in secret from the house to dream her dreams and think the long and mazy thoughts of youth, encountering only the drowsy animals, who lifted their heads and gazed without interest at the white figure, whose sandals made so little sound upon the deep dust, that she might have been a ghost drifting by.

Now, however, her mood was different, desperate and taut. Even these brief hours of liberty were numbered and would end so very soon. Something had to happen, must happen.

And, in truth, it did, swift and startling as a jagged spear of lightning out of a sky of azure. An arm of iron clamped about her from behind, and before the scream could be born her mouth was gagged.

DUMBFOUNDED, stunned, for the moment she could not even fight. Her assailant took advantage of that to tie the end of the gag behind her head. Now she began to fight and kick and writhe. A waste of effort. The unknown gripped either arm with fingers like talons and thrust her mercilessly forward down the empty shaft of night.

Questions stabbed through her: Who? Why? What?

She found no answers.

The nightbird called again: twice, a pause, then once.

The sound came in her very ear, and was answered in the same sequence.

Signals! So the birds about, when she had been weaving pretty fancies, were of quite another feather—sinister denizens of the dark. Yet what could they want with her?

The bold outcrop of rocks, known as the Hill of the Sleeper loomed up. It was in one of the far fields, remote from the house. She was thrust around it to the further side, and her fears and bewilderment increased, for in the glitter of the stars she saw two shadowy figures waiting, and round about were many of her father's sheep and goats and the taller outlines of oxen. She was brought before the twain, one of whom towered like a tree.

"What now? Who's this?" he asked, in a rich and mellow voice, deep as the tolling of a bell.

The hands released their grip, and an instant later something sharp and cold pricked between her shoulder blades. The point of the dagger warned that she was still a prisoner.

"As you ordered, chief," said a squeaky voice, "I kept watch on the house. This one came out and when I saw she was walking deliberately in this direction I knew she had been sent to spy so I seized her and brought her here, not knowing what else to do."

His tone held a whining note as if he feared the tall man.

"What have you to say, girl?" asked the leader.

"She is gagged."

"Take out the gag, Timothy. None will hear her now!"

The relief was great, and for a long minute she stood silent, inhaling deeply and passing the tip of her tongue over bruised lips and gums.

"Speak!"

Naomi mustered her wits, and told in stumbling words who she was and how innocent had been her stroll in the night. As she spoke two other shadows joined the group, having driven up further sheep and goats.

"And what do you think we do here, girl?" the leader asked.

Naomi's spirit had revived. A lie could not help her.

"You are thieves who steal our flocks."

The tall man laughed, and his laughter was as rich as his voice. In the gloom his teeth flashed, a bar of whiteness.

"You are honest, girl."

The form beside him grumbled.

"Chief, they must have sent her, suspecting something. This is no time for laughter."

"Silence, dog,"—a growl lacking all mellowness—"How long have you had the right to say when I laugh and when I weep?"

"We must be gone, chief," urged the ratlike squeak from behind. "She knows too much — perhaps more than we guess. Let me slit her throat."

"Idiot!" said the leader, scornfully.

Then another spoke up.

"A thought comes to me, chief. This is indeed the daughter of the two old misers. Why not take her with us for ransom? Soon she is to marry Isaac, son of the merchant. There is much profit in the match, and much gossip in Jerusalem that they should have been able to contrive it. For her they would not part with a penny, but they will pay well to have the bride restored so that the rich deal may go through."

The tall man considered.

"I have heard some talk," he said. "Is this so, girl?"

"Sir," said Naomi. and she hailed him thus because something within her said that he was worthy of respect even though a thief, "so it is planned, but it will not be. I am not going to marry Isaac."

He chuckled.

"You have spirit, girl," he approved. "But how does it come that you reject your parent's choice, the son of the rich merchant?"

"I do not love him," said Naomi, simply, speaking only to him, forgetting the others.

"Love? Is there still love, then, in the world to-day?"

"So I believe."

"I would I could," he said, hushed, even wistful.

"Chief! Chief!" urged one of his men, "the night wears on. Kill her, take her, but let us be off with our gains before it is too late."

And the others joined in a muttering chorus.

"Cease your growlings, curs," he commanded. "You, Jacob, light the lantern." And when they would have protested anew he silenced them: "Enough! Enough! No one will see it here behind the hill.

I would look at this girl who faces death or kidnapping with the serenity of some high-born lady and speaks of love in the tones of a nightingale." Again they protested. "Silence, sweepings of the gutters of Jerusalem! I am your chief. Yours only to obey. Have I not earned a moment above your cloddish understanding? The lantern, Jacob!"

Jacob had crouched on the ground and struck a flint, lighting a tallow candle in a small, open lantern which burned bright in the gloom. The leader held out his left hand—for his right held a stout shepherd's staff — and the others fell back out of the revealing light, so that now, indeed, they seemed to be alone, those two, in a golden tent.

Naomi forgot fears and dismay. She gazed up at him, eager to learn what manner of man this was who behaved so strangely. And immediately she saw that, whatever else he might be, he was very much a man and very unlike Isaac. He towered above her, broad and formidable, with a face rough-hewn as one of the rocks of the hill beside them. His jaw was strong as was his mouth, but when he smiled his face became quizzical and merry and warm. His bold eyes, studying her, softened and moistened.

Standing straight and tall and slim, head high and flung back a little as she looked up at him, Naomi made a picture which would have cast a spell on a barbarous Ethiopian.

Neither spoke. They dwelt in their little tent, absorbed, lost. Nodding slowly several times, he communed with himself and, in a fashion, with her. At last he blew out the candle and the night dissolved the golden moment.

"Jacob, take this," he said, handing over the lantern. "Attend me, men. The plan is changed. Disperse the flocks somewhat and quickly, and be gone."

Now at these words a storm of revolt broke out.

"You have heard the order," he said, his tone a deep tocsin, and when they hesitated still he went on: "Have no fear. You shall be paid for your profitless night. Have I ever cheated you? But now, curs, be off to your kennels — be off to your sties, swine. I'll follow you to Jerusalem presently."

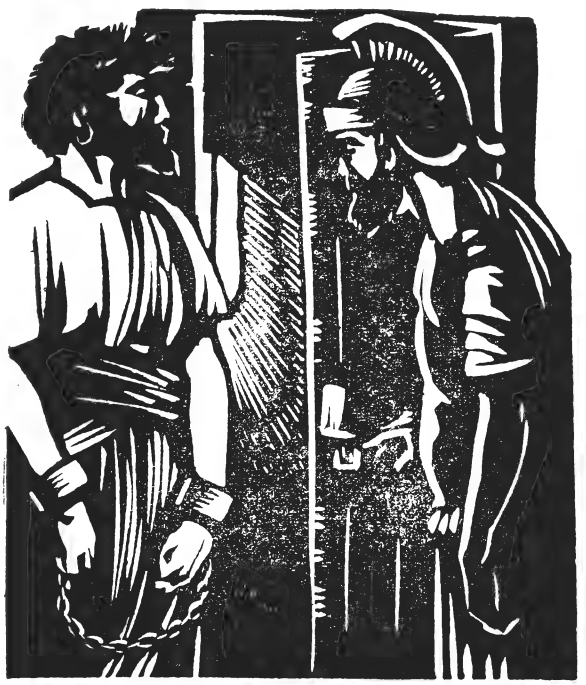
His rage blazed up, and he struck about furiously with the great staff bringing it down on their skulls and across their shoulders. They fled away, scattering the grazing animals in all directions, and yelping even as the curs he had named them.

He looked after them, profile craggy against the stars. The bleating, the baaing, the lowing, died away. Only the crickets shrilled. He turned back to her, and a pause came though it was far from empty.

"Sir, why have you done this strange thing?" she asked.

He laughed quietly.

"Being a woman, you know full well—yet being a woman you must have me say it. So be it: I did this folly because of you. Folly it was, since we had made a fine haul, and I had all arranged for quick disposal. Yet what is life if a man cannot fling away a few sheep and goats and cattle to satisfy a fancy that wells up inside him?"



"It was a fancy that did you credit, sir, and made me happy."

"In truth," said he gravely, "there is but little that does me credit, yet if you are made happy it seems good may come of sentimental foolishness. Come, Naomi. The dawn is not far off and it would not be well for me to be found on another's land, no matter how worthy the reason."

They walked together side by side, and silence came upon them again, since each had much to think about. Presently the white oblong of the house took shape ahead.

"I leave you here," he said, pausing. "You declare you will not marry this wealthy Isaac because you do not love him. What do you know of love, Naomi?"

"Very little, sir, I'm afraid. Only that my heart tells me there is such a thing, and it is more important than anything else."

A small sigh came queerly from one so strong and fierce.

"I know nothing of love, Naomi," he said, "and never have known it since I was a babe abandoned in the Temple. It may be that lack has made me what I am, though in telling you these things I do not crave for pity. We have said so little and so much. Naomi, girl, if you are not pledged to this Isaac—at least in your own heart—would you pay a debt?"

"What debt, sir?"

"Perhaps there is no debt, since it was you who stopped me robbing your farm, and not any goodness on my part. Yet you and yours—for this reason or that — still are owners of much stock which might have vanished away. Will you take the air again to-morrow night? Will you meet me by the rocky hill?"

"I know I should not," said Naomi candidly, "and yet I know I will." The first pennants of dawn were flying in the east. "I must go quickly now. And you—oh, you also — for my family are early awake. But first, who are you?"

"You have the answer to that already, Naomi: I am a thief."

"Oh, I must run! Your name, sir, your name?"

Said he then, "I am Barabbas."

She touched his hand lightly. "Barabbas!" she echoed, softly, and hastened off, the syllables singing in her heart, her sandals scarcely seeming to touch the earth.

AT the morning meal her parents were well pleased to note the new colour in Naomi's cheeks, the new light in her eyes. Obviously in the night she had suffered a change of heart which augured well for a successful conclusion to the deal with Isaac. The deal with Samuels had already been finalised. The little farm was theirs. The Lord was kind to those who were careful to pay their just tithe to his servants at the Temple.

Satisfaction grew on the next morning and the next. In their all-absorbing love for money they had long lost any affection they might have had for Naomi, but between themselves they gloated.

Now on that third morning she felt she must go to the well where the people round about draw the sweet water for drinking. No need for her to do this — a servant took the pitcher — but she would meet her only confidant and friend, the sole person she could trust with the secret of her happy heart.

This was the Old One. The longest memory could not recall when the Old One had not been a grown woman. Her name had been long forgotten. She was said to have lived much more than five score years and it was confidently expected that she would equal the span of Methuselah. Certainly she retained all her faculties and was full of wisdom from the years. Perhaps the most notable thing, however, was that, although she heard everybody's secrets, she stored away their loves and hates, their hopes and fears, as a squirrel hides its stock of nuts, and never betrayed anything of her harvest of the lives of others.

The usual group of women gossiped in the shade, resting pitchers on their hips or on the stone sides. The Old One sat on the low rock which formed a kind of arm-chair. It was her own particular throne, polished into smooth-

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Wings from the North

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF

HARFANG, the great arctic snow owl, was starving. A winter of bad omen had descended upon the tundras of Keewatin, where the life-tide rose and ebbed with the north Canadian sun.

Instinct had warned Harfang that this would not be like the winters he had known before. Always, during his seven years of life in polar latitudes, there had been food in the darkness and snow. This time there was none, and a frigid hush of famine hung over his world, while a retreating sun glowed ever more briefly to the south, and blacked out.

Something had been wrong with the life-giving light all year. Grasses, lichens, and mosses seemed to lack substance and vitality. The sun had shone brightly enough during the polar summer, but some factor in its rays was missing. Some vibration essential to normal growth was out of synchrony, and the little creeping creatures upon the neo-glacial tundras had withered as from a plague.

Hardest hit were the lemmings; those gopher-like rodents of the arctic, noted for their suicide migrations. These had begun to disappear in mid-summer, while their young were few and poor. So, in measure, the snow owls had suffered, since they depended upon the lemmings for food. So likewise had all life suffered, depending so starkly upon the sun's largesse.

Migrant birds had left long before, prompted by instinct to go south sooner than in normal years, while the snowshoe rabbits and ptarmigan had disappeared. Deep beneath the snow and ice, a few muskrats huddled in their dens, and subsisted upon what food they had been able to store. Even the ermines and little arctic foxes, which could be prey for an owl desperate with hunger, were mysteriously missing. Nature's continuity had been broken, and death was upon the tundras.

Like a spectre in the silence of starlight and aurora, the big, white-mantled owl winnowed back and forth in search of any living thing that might furnish fuel for his body. Blue-chilled stars flared from a black sky, and at times there was scarcely enough vapour in the sub-zero atmosphere to make them twinkle. In the void of interstellar space, so near to earth's surface, the northern lights flickered, died, and flamed again.

After a time, Harfang alighted upon a hummock where he and Nyctea, his mate, had nested in the springtime. His rounded head appeared as large as that of a year-old child, while his length neared thirty inches of purest white. His wings, which were swift enough to fly down a wild duck in the air, spread more than five feet from tip to tip. His body was so thickly clad with fur-like plumage that, despite its gaunt condition and the fifty-below-zero cold, the life that pulsed within stayed fever-warm.

Harfang's eyes were perhaps his most impressive feature, since they looked forward like those of a man, instead of sidewise, as in most birds. Also, they were designed to see equally well under the never-setting sun of Keewatin's summer, or in the endless dark of Arctic winter that offset it. Their almost oriental slant gave the owl an appearance of mystic wisdom which he did not feel. All he knew was that his life-fire must have fuel or, before long, its warmth would sink and end his life.

Another tribulation was upon Harfang — Nyctea had disappeared three days before. Harfang had returned many times to their nest-hummock, and once, when he caught a stray gull, had hurried there to share it with her. His tension was becoming acute, now. Inside his head, a surer instrument than any made by mankind, was warning him that a great storm was on the way, and that he must leave at once, or perish. But still he lingered, waiting for Nyctea.

Driven down from their Arctic haunts by a blizzard, the two white owls sought refuge in a milder clime. But danger and death lurked there, too.

Suddenly the big owl tensed. Not even his hearing, which could detect a rat's squeal a quarter-mile away, had caught it, but a finer vibration within his consciousness told him something was approaching. He turned and peered into the blue-black dark which, to his eyes, was like a steel engraving that showed every detail. Before long, he saw his oncoming mate, and poised motionless.

DOWN from the boreal sky Nyctea came; a great frosty bird on wings as silent as thought. She skimmed over the snow for seventy yards, veered upward, and alighted beside Harfang like a wraith.

But the pair of snow owls made no demonstration. Harfang had not flown to meet her, nor would he favour her with so much as a glance now; whereupon Nyctea uttered a hawk-like "cree-ee," the snow owl's only note. Harfang ruffled himself and stared over the tundra. All too well he knew that his mate had found no hunting.

For a time, the two white figures stood statuelike atop their hummock. What manner of communication may have passed between them is beyond any instrument to record. Then as one bird they took to the air—the last of the snow owls to leave.

This time, theirs was no winnowing flight over the barrens to look for prey that no longer showed. Upward into the night they soared, with long, even wingbeats, ascending toward the aurora and the stars. And their course lay to the south-west, toward the far-off Pacific coast, away from the Great Storm to come.

Hour upon hour they flew, mounting once above a disturbance to avoid winds that would tax their weakened wings; two ghostly bits of life, pulsing through space and cold, thousands of feet above the earth. Always they bore south, with a veering toward the west, while the storm of a decade loomed against the horizon behind them. They never had made a flight of such magnitude before, but the Messenger of Manitou, whose care it is to watch over wild things, was pointing the way.

There is a boundary beyond which even the fittest cannot carry on. Toward the end of their second day aloft, both owls began to falter. Their bodies had been emaciated when they left Keewatin. Now, the strain of continuous flying was reducing them to feather-wrapped skeletons. This proved their salvation in the end for, when a southerly gale began tossing them about like derelicts in a typhoon, they were forced downward.

Heavy snow clouds were riding the wind by now, and beneath these they found themselves over a wooded and roll-

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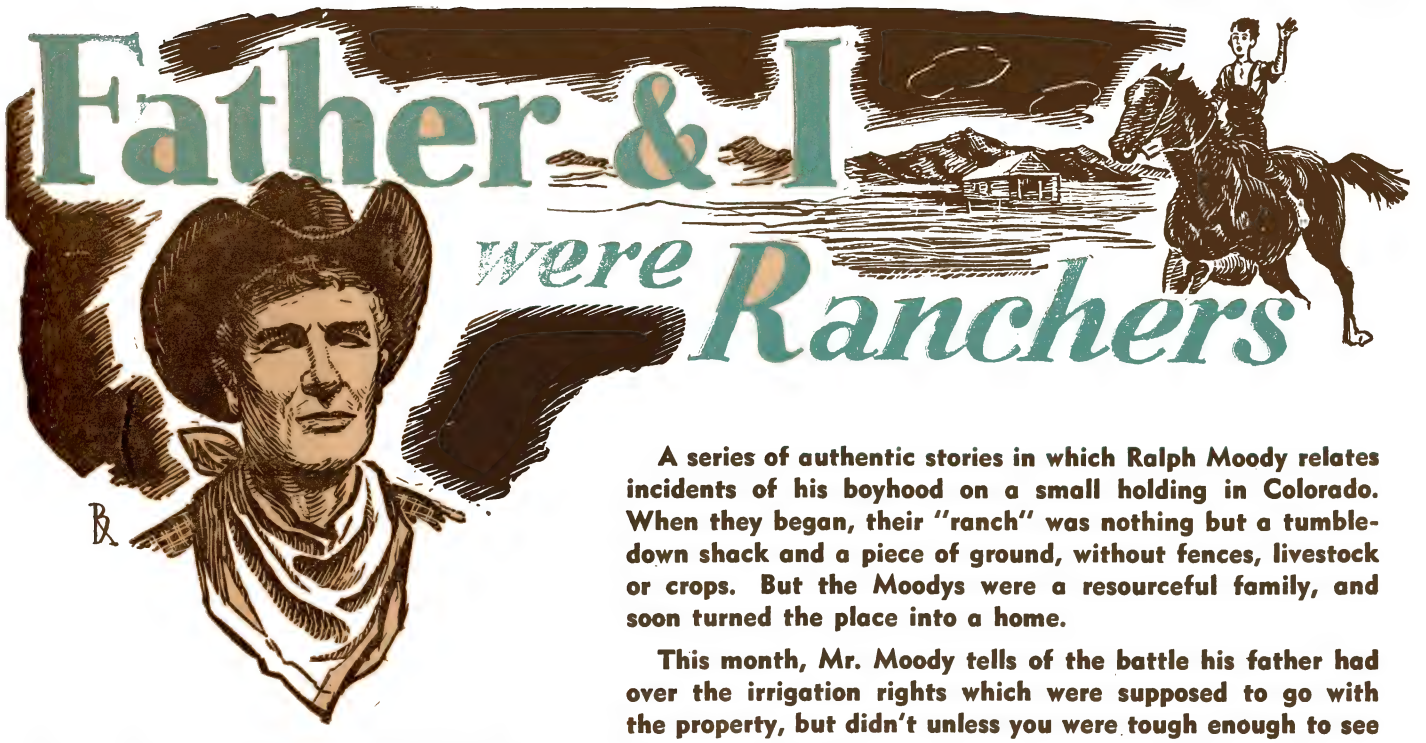
Father & I were Ranchers



A series of authentic stories in which Ralph Moody relates incidents of his boyhood on a small holding in Colorado. When they began, their "ranch" was nothing but a tumble-down shack and a piece of ground, without fences, livestock or crops. But the Moodys were a resourceful family, and soon turned the place into a home.

This month, Mr. Moody tells of the battle his father had over the irrigation rights which were supposed to go with the property, but didn't unless you were tough enough to see that you got them.

By RALPH MOODY

WE GO TO AN AUCTION

THE second Saturday after I went up to Two Dog's there was an auction at one of the ranches down in Bear Creek Valley. Father and Mother were going to go and see if they could buy a good milch cow. While we were eating supper Friday night they were talking about the auction. Mother wanted to buy some things for the house, and some more chickens, and she said she'd like to get a turkey hen if she could pick one up reasonably. Afterwards they talked about what kind of a cow they'd like. Mother said to be sure it was one with a heifer calf, and she hoped it would be a Jersey because they gave good rich milk. Then Father said, "Mame, don't you think Ralph ought to go along and help pick out the cow, since he's earned part of the money?" I was drinking milk when he said it and caught my breath so quick I pretty near choked to death. As soon as supper was over I rode up to the Corcorans' to tell them I wouldn't be there to herd the cows next day.

Mr. Wright was the auctioneer, and they started off by selling furniture and pots and pans and things out of the house. Mother stayed there to see what bargains she could find, but Father and I went to the corrals and barns to look at the stock.

I guess everybody who lived within ten miles was there. Mrs. Corcoran was in the corral looking every cow over and feeling their bags, and Fred Aultland and Jerry Alder were in the barn looking at the horses.

Fred came out and stood beside us while we were looking at the cows. There must have been thirty of them. He put his foot up on the bottom rail of the fence, laid his arms on the top one, and rested his chin against it. "Charlie, there are two or three pretty good cows there," he said. "Why don't you buy that brindle over there that Liz Corcoran's looking at, and this big Holstein nearest us? They'd give you all the milk and butter the kids could handle."

Father didn't say anything for a minute, then he smiled at Fred. "Did you ever hear of the fellow who could have bought Brooklyn Bridge for a million dollars, only he was short nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars and fifty cents?"

Fred laughed and said, "You can swing it all right, Charlie. I don't think those two are going very high, anyway." Then he rumpled up my hair, and said, "I'm going to have a couple more hayings this year, and you got Spikes here to help you pay for them. I hear tell he's holdin' Liz up for thirty-five cents a day now." He said it loud enough so that she couldn't help hearing him, and then he laughed till you could hear him all over the place.

Father just chuckled a little. Then he said, "It isn't only the cost of two cows, Fred. I'm going to have to ration close if I have enough winter feed for three horses and one cow off that little patch of oats and alfalfa."

Mrs. Corcoran got red as a beet when Fred laughed about me charging her thirty-five cents a day for herding her cows, but instead of going away she started looking at cows nearer to us, and I think it was just so she could listen. Anyway, Fred let his voice way down and said, "I can stop you on that one. too, Soon as cold weather sets in I'll go to baling all the alfalfa I'm not going to feed to my own horses. There's always a lot of leaf and chaff shakes out when you bale alfalfa. It's too dusty for horses, but it's great cow feed. Liz'll only give me a dollar and a half a ton for it, and I'd rather sell it to you. Those cows would turn it into some damn cheap butter."

It was the hay part that convinced Father. He left me to look at horses and hogs with Fred and Jerry while he went back to the house to talk with Mother.

I don't know when I ever ate anything as good as we had at the auction. They had dug a big pit out by the windmill and built a fire of railway sleepers in it the night before. And there was a whole yearling calf roasting over the pitful of red-hot coals. They had a windlass rigged up over the pit, and the whole dressed calf was trussed on a turn-bar. An old man with a big walrus moustache was turning the windlass and throwing handfuls of salt on the meat as it turned brown. You could smell it all over the yard and it almost made me drool.

It was about noon when Mr. Wright finished auctioning off all the things from the house, and the hens and ducks and turkeys. Then two or three men helped lift the roasted calf from over the pit and put it on a big heavy table. There were boxes and boxes of soft round rolls and two or three firkins of butter set out on another table. They brought out four or five butcher knives and put them on the table with the meat. Then they brought a wash-boiler full of coffee from the house, and pitchers of milk, and pies, cakes, and doughnuts. Everybody who could get near enough to the meat grabbed a knife and

sliced off big wedges to put in the split rolls and make sandwiches. I was one of the first ones to get a sandwich. Jerry Alder put me on his shoulder and went through the crowd around the table like a Shorthorn bull going through a pack of coyotes. I ate so much my stomach ached clear up to my wishbone.

As soon as dinner was over Mr. Wright started the horse auction. There were some pretty good horses, and Fred paid more than a hundred dollars for one of them. He was a three-year-old bay, and almost as big as old Jeff that I rode to pull the stacker. Everybody stood out in a circle in the yard, and they led the horses out one at a time. Before anybody bid on it, the man who was having the auction came out into the circle and told about the horse. He would tell how old it was and how long he had owned it and how well it would pull and all kinds of things. If it was one he'd raised from a colt, he would tell which mare was the dam and what stallion the colt was after. Every time he finished telling about a horse he'd pat it with his hand and say, "Sound as a nut!"

We couldn't be buying any horses, so we stood at the back of the circle. I guess the horses were all bringing more money than Father and Mother had thought they would, because I could see them keep looking at each other every time the bidding went above fifty dollars. After a while Mother whispered, "With horses selling at this kind of price, the cows will probably be outrageous. I do hope there will be one cheap enough so that we can afford her, but we'll have to have money for groceries this winter."

I was standing on Father's side and couldn't hear what he said when he turned his head to whisper to her, but she didn't watch the horse auction any more; she just kept looking down at the ground. In a little while she leaned over close to him and said, "I'm afraid I spent more than I should have on things for the house, but there were some lovely bargains." Then Father sent me to look at Fred's new horse while he and Mother took a little walk.

FRED took me around by the cow corral while they were auctioning off the last horse. He went over and talked to the man who had been leading the horses out to the ring, and I saw Fred slip a silver dollar into his hand when he turned away from the corral.

Father and Mother had come back, and we stood right in the front row for the cow auction. Father stood next to Mother and then came me, and then Jerry and Fred and Mrs. Corcoran—Mr. Corcoran had to stay home and herd the cows. They brought out one cow after another, and they sold for anywhere from thirty to fifty dollars apiece. One or two old skinny ones sold for a dollar or two under thirty but the man who was having the auction bragged about every one of them.

I kept watching for the two cows Fred had pointed out to Father, but I didn't see them. I wasn't too sure I could recognise the Holstein, because there were ten or twelve black-and-white cows sold, but there was only the one brindle in the corral, so I knew I wouldn't miss her. Mrs. Corcoran bid on almost every cow, but she always stopped when the bidding got up to thirty or thirty-five dollars. It seemed as though they must have brought out all the best cows first, or else everybody got cows who wanted to pay lots of money for them, because when it was getting along towards the last, nobody was bidding much over thirty dollars. I thought sure they'd come to the end before the man Fred had been talking to led out the big Holstein. I knew her the minute he led her into the ring, and poked Father on the leg.

Mrs. Corcoran stepped right forward a foot when the man led the Holstein in, and she bid twenty dollars for her the first crack out of the box. Father said, "Twenty-one," somebody else said, "Twenty-one fifty," and then Mrs. Corcoran yelled out, "Twenty-five dollars." I knew she was going to bid more than we could pay, and hung my head down. I think I was saying a little prayer that she'd stop at thirty, when I saw Fred Aultland step right on her foot. She jumped and glared around at him, but she didn't bid on the Holstein cow any more. Father said "Twenty-five fifty," and somebody said, "Twenty-six," but we got her for twenty-six fifty.

Before they led out the brindle cow, Mrs. Corcoran had moved down the circle away from Fred, and she yelled "Twenty-five dollars," before the man was through telling how good a milker the cow was. I was watching her and didn't notice Fred moving down there, too, till he came right up beside her. I guess I wasn't the only one who saw him step on her foot that time, because some young fellow on the other side of the ring called out, "Get her again, Fred!" Everybody started to laugh, and Mr. Wright yelled, "Sold," just as soon as Father said, "Twenty-six dollars."

I helped Father harness Bill and Nig back to the wagon while Fred and Bessie Aultland helped Mother collect the things she had bought. Father let me sit on the back of the wagon and lead our new cows home. He seemed happy while we were loading the things into the wagon, but Mother didn't say much. She had her lips buttoned up tight and her face was bright red. On the way home she talked most of the time, though. I couldn't hear all she said, because the Holstein cow held back on the rope, but I did hear enough to know she had spent more than she thought she should have. She said, "I just couldn't let those lovely Buff Orpington pullets go by at twenty-five cents apiece." And, "Two dollars and fifty cents does seem a lot of money to spend for two turkey hens, but Bessie says they're good foragers and will cost hardly a penny to feed. If I have good luck and am able to raise a brood of young turkeys, they should furnish us some very inexpensive meat—and it's so nice to have a turkey for Thanksgiving."

Then she said something about it probably not being necessary to spend the two dollars for a chest-of-drawers for the girls' room, but it was solid walnut. The first thing I heard Father say was, "That's a nice-looking little cuckoo clock you got." I looked around when Father said that, and saw the red run right up Mother's neck. Then they both laughed, and Mother said, "Don't you josh me about that clock, Charlie. I know we didn't need it, but it looked so much like home, and I just got bidding for it against Mrs. Thied and some other lady, and couldn't stop."

Grace had seen us coming when we were half a mile away, and all the youngsters came running up the road to meet us. She and Muriel had Hal by each hand and were almost dragging him along. I guess we all felt we were kind of rich people to be able to buy all those things. Philip put his bid in right away to be allowed to herd our cows.

THE IRRIGATION FIGHT

THE irrigation fight broke out soon after we got our cows. July was hot, the creek was low, and there was only half a head of water coming through the ditch. It started at the gorge where Bear Creek came out of the mountains, and each ranch, all the way down, had rights to so many running square inches of water. Some of it soaked into the ground as it moved along, and some was drawn up by the sun, but — unless the creek was very low — there was enough for everyone to take his full measure. Each ranch had its own ditch box. They were wooden chutes that the whole body of water passed through. And each chute had a spillway with a gate to let out the full measure of that rancher's water right. There were gauge marks on the boxes and, when the ditch was running less than full, each man was supposed to set his gate so that it would take only his share.

There were water hogs near the head of the ditch. They were men who would take their full measure of water, and more, too, when the creek was low and crops were burning up. There had been a feud between the ranchers at the head and tail of the ditch ever since it was built. The first that I knew much about it was one night when Fred Aultland came down to talk to Father. They had a deal where Fred used all the water for both ranches twenty days, and then we had it for one. Fred came the evening before our day to have the water. Our oat field was so dry that Father was afraid the kernels wouldn't fill unless the ground got a good soaking right away. And the leaves on our peas and beans were curled up and withering. The vegetables from Mother's garden were little and scrawny.

I knew there was something the matter when I saw Fred coming down the wagon road. He always drove his tall bays as fast as they could trot, but that night they were just moping along. A cloud of dust was rising from the wheels of the buckboard that looked like white smoke from a bonfire. And Fred was hunched over with his elbows resting on his knees. Father and I went out to meet him as he came into the yard, and he looked terrible. One of his eyes was swollen and black, and there was dried blood around his mouth and nose. I started to ask him what the matter was, but Father laid his hand on my shoulder, so we just waited for Fred to talk first.

After a minute or two, he looked up at Father, and said, "Charlie, I'm afraid I've started something I'm not big enough to finish. For the last three days there hasn't been more than a trickle of water coming through the ditch as far as my place. Jerry Alder, Old Man Wright, and I went up this morning to

have a look. Hardesty and Hawkins, both, had their sluice gates wide open and were taking double their full measure. Kuhl had his gate wide open and had made a cut in the bank where the ditch is built up at the back of his alfalfa field. He tried to tell me it was a natural break and he didn't know it was there, but there were shovel marks in the bank. The cut's filled in now—or it was when I left there."

Fred didn't say anything for a minute or two, and Father said, "Isn't there any court you can appeal to?"

Fred squirted a line of tobacco juice down between the off horse's heels and kept looking at the place where he had spit. After a while, he said, "Yep. We could haul 'em into court, and every one of 'em would lie like hell and say they never took more than the water that goes with their land. It would be their word against ours and we wouldn't have a snowball's chance."

Father said, "Can't you take enough witnesses up there to see what they're doing and outweigh their testimony in court?"

Fred spit between the other horse's heels, and said, "Yep, but they've all got their land posted, and we couldn't see what they're doing without getting on their land. They'd get us as bad for trespass as we could get them for stealing water."

Father said, "Isn't there a way of proving how much water passes through the ditch at their upper boundary and how much they let pass beyond them?"

Fred seemed to be thinking about it for a minute, then he looked up at Father, and said, "Look, Charlie, this is the hell of it for you and me: The water goes with the land. Your deed says you are entitled to so many inches of water, or *'such proportion of same as may be available!'* There's nothing that says whether that means available at the head of the ditch, or available at your own sluice gate. It's been fought ever since there were courts and ditches here, and there are rulings both ways. Every damned one of us would break himself if we tried to fight it clear through the courts. And, besides, if we'd get a high court ruling that it meant available at our own sluice boxes, these ranches at the end of the ditch wouldn't be worth a damn an acre. There's only one way to do it; we've got to take the law into our own hands and fight the water through the ditch. And, by God, I'm going to start tonight."

Father didn't like me to be around when men were swearing, and Fred looked mad enough to begin any minute; but before he did, Father sent me to get our cows. They were picketed out on the prairie near the railway track.

DURING supper Father hardly said a word. Mother didn't eat much and kept biting her lip the way she always did when she was nervous. Father always milked the Holstein and I milked the brindle. While we were milking that night, I asked him if he was going to do anything about the water. He didn't answer me for a while, then he said, "Son, there are times a man has to do things he doesn't like to, in order to protect his family." He didn't say any more, and I didn't think I ought to ask him.

Something woke me in the night. It must have been after moonset, because it was dark as pitch. I lay listening for a long time, then I thought I heard a man's voice from over toward the railway track, so I got up and looked out the windows. There were three little lights moving around in our oat field, and two more in our bean field. They were so far away that they looked like fireflys. I thought Father ought to know about it, and went into the house to tell him. Mother was wide awake, but Father wasn't in bed with her. She told me to go right back to bed because I needed my rest, and that the lights out in our fields were all right.

I went back to the bunkhouse, but I didn't go back to bed. I pulled my overalls on over my nightgown and tiptoed out into the darkness. I knew Father was out there somewhere with a lantern, and I wanted to see what was going on. When I was almost to our oat field, the lights all came together in one place and moved up the railway towards Fred Aultland's. I thought I heard water gurgling among the oats, and when I went a little closer my foot sank ankle-deep in soft mud. While I was standing there watching the lights from the lanterns grow smaller and smaller up the track, I heard the sound of half a dozen rifle shots from way off towards the west. I was worried about Father, and afraid he might not be one of the men with a lantern, but be farther up the ditch where there was shooting. I wanted to run after him and tell him to come home, but I was scared and went back to the bunkhouse.

I didn't sleep another wink all night, and when it was just light enough so that I could see the outline of Loretta Heights against the eastern sky, I heard Father come home and go in the kitchen door. I couldn't see him and would never have known him by his walk. His feet sounded as though they were dragging, and he had on rubber boots. I heard him take them off before he went into the house. A little later I heard him coughing. It was that dry, hollow cough he had after the wind-storm. As soon as it was light enough to see in good shape, I got up and got the milk buckets. I milked both cows, watered the pigs, and fed the horses before I went in to breakfast. I got cramps in my hands before I got done milking the big Holstein. She gave a bucket brimful of milk, and her teats were large with little bits of holes in them.

Father wasn't up when I went to work, and at breakfast Mother wouldn't talk. She kept biting her lip and her eyes looked as though she had been crying. I didn't see a soul around Corcoran's place when I let the cows out of the corral, and there was nobody in sight when I went past Aultlands'. The road was all muddy where our ditch went under it. The culvert was a big one, too, so I knew there must have been a terrible head of water come down through there during the night.

I didn't see a moving thing, except the cows and Fanny, until Grace brought out my dinner pail. She said Father had just got up and that there was a big red lump on his forehead, and he had been coughing in his sleep all morning. Grace could usually get Mother to talk, but she hadn't been able to find out a thing. Mother made her play out in the back yard with the youngsters all morning. I told her about the water in our oat field, and the lanterns and the shooting up beyond us on the ditch. I thought maybe the lump on Father's forehead was where he had been hit with a bullet, but Grace said it wasn't. She had read lots of books about wars—she liked them best of all—and she said she'd bet it was where he had been hit with a clubbed rifle.

There must have been some terrible battles up the ditch those next few nights. Father would leave the house just after I went to bed, and wouldn't get home till nearly daylight. He had another big lump on his cheek-bone that turned black and blue, and Fred Aultland and Jerry Alder and Carl Henry looked all beat up when I saw them. Jerry had his right arm in a sling.

Saturday night there was a meeting at our house. Men came from all the ranches west of us — half-way to the mountains. They must have started getting there just after I went to sleep, but I woke up when the first buggy came into our yard. It was Mr. Wright. I knew his voice when Father went to help him unhitch his team, and I knew there was going to be some kind of meeting, because the first thing Mr. Wright said was, "Ain't any of the rest of the fellas got here yet, Charlie?" And besides that, Mother had put Hal out to sleep with Philip and me.

Grace didn't get up till the third team came. Then she tiptoed into my room and we peeked out under the curtain together. The men all stood around the barn and talked till Carl Henry came—he was the last one—then they went into the house. Grace and I knew we shouldn't have done it, and that we'd get a good spanking if we got caught, but we crept out the bunkhouse door and crawled around to the kitchen window. It was open, so we had to hunker up against the side of the house and keep real quiet.

At first, everybody was trying to talk at once, and someone said the only way they could ever keep water coming down the ditch in dry spells was to put men with high-powered rifles up on the hills, and shoot hell out of any so-and-so that went tampering with a ditch box. Then somebody else said that wouldn't do any good because the sheriff would get out a posse and throw them all in the lockup. They talked, and talked, and talked. Some of them even shouted, but I didn't hear Father's voice until Fred Aultland said, "Charlie, you must have done some thinking about this, but I haven't heard you say anything."

Everybody got real still then, and Father talked so low we couldn't much more than hear him. He said, "Well, it seems to me that courts are usually the best places to settle disputes if men can't get together peaceably, but in this instance both sides are afraid of what the court's ruling might be. We've been able to fight enough water down through the ditch at night to save our crops for the moment, but that won't do in the long run, because, sooner or later, somebody's going to be killed. When that happens, the matter will be settled in court whether we like it or not. It would be

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A BOY AND A GUN

All country boys cherish the desire to have a gun of their own. Using Dad's isn't the same thing. But no matter whose gun it is, the day you take it out alone for the first time is a big adventure.

By Jean E. Turnley

MISS O'LOUGHLIN sat at the old desk at the back of the classroom correcting the fifth and sixth-grade essays. It was the middle of a warm spring afternoon and the school was very somnolent. In the horse-yard the ponies stood grouped against the fence in the shade of the wattle trees and stamped and swished their tails against the flies.

Gertie McLaren, with her mouth open, was watching a newly-hatched moth tremulously making its way up one of the long wire-windows.

Scarcely lifting her eyes, Miss O'Loughlin said automatically, "Shut your mouth, Gertie, and get on with your work!"

All heads bent lower at once; pens scratched more diligently. Miss O'Loughlin was strict and no one wished to incur the sharp edge of her tongue. Sometimes she frowned as a more than usually atrocious spelling error met her eye, to be heavily scored with a thick blue pencil That angry blue pencilling seemed to hurt almost as much as a sharp slap.

Sometimes Miss O'Loughlin wrote something caustic in her dashing hand along the margin, and then the desk shook and the paper squirmed.

To-day's essays were entitled, *How I Spent the Week-end. On Saturday,* Jimmie Wake had written, *I took the gun out by myself and shot six rabbits.*

Miss O'Loughlin permitted a small smile to embrace her aquiline features. The pupils of Kurringatta South State School were rarely given to any flights of fancy, excepting perhaps Averil Holmes, who sometimes waxed poetic over fairies.

Jimmie Wake, on the other hand, was a stolid little boy, very reticent, but forthright. Not overbright, but a plodder. She glanced, consideringly, to where his bullet head was bent over his exercise book.

THE two Wake children, Jimmie and his elder sister, Lily, had all the earmarks of careful rearing. They were always properly clad and nicely spoken. Miss O'Loughlin was well aware that their mother was rather fussy with them. Her prominent black eyes flicked somewhat maliciously from Jimmie to his sister.

"Lily," she said, her voice fluting out in the quiet school-room, "tell me, does father really allow Jimmie to take a shotgun out by himself?"

The whole school looked up. It was a welcome break. Lily Wake, a rosy girl with fat black plaits, giggled. She was smart, top of her class, and well aware that she was Miss O'Loughlin's favourite.

"Oh, no, Miss O'Loughlin! He's not allowed!" Then, emboldened by the teacher's air of including her in a grown-up joke, Lily added, "He's always pestering, but father says he's too little yet!"

Miss O'Loughlin's mercilessly good-humoured smile returned to Jimmie. He had gone rather red about the ears, but his eyes were fixed steadily on his book. In his mind he was saying over and over, "Silly old ——, silly old ——, silly old ———." He got added pleasure out of saying the forbidden word in his head, in front of them all, as it were, the whole school listening. "Silly old ——, silly old ——, silly old ——."

"I just wondered, Lily," Miss O'Loughlin went on, her voice sweetly reasonable, "because you see he has here"—she read it with clear diction, for all the school to hear—"*On Saturday I took the gun out by myself and shot six rabbits.*"

Everybody laughed.

"Jimmie!" Miss O'Loughlin said in that honeyed voice, not mad with him, but worse, making him sound silly. "Have you been combining fact with fancy for the purposes of fiction?"

Jimmie gritted his teeth. Under his lowered eyelashes he could see Whitey Burns grinning widely across the aisle and he guessed the form Whitey's baiting would take after school.

"The very best writers do it, you know, Jimmie. You are in distinguished company! I think, however, Lily," she addressed the top desk in an intoxicatingly confiding way, "that this is a pure example of the wish being father to the thought!"

Lily and her desk-mates laughed heartily at the teacher's witticism, outstripping the rest of the school in their superior understanding. The others just giggled happily, either at Jimmie Wake's discomfiture or because it was a good chance to make merry.

Before the mirth could get out of hand, however, the teacher's unrelenting eye found Pud O'Connor dipping the ends of Mary Allen's pigtails in his inkwell. The laughter was abruptly squashed and Pud hauled out for chastisement.

Jimmie was glad to have the attention diverted from him. He sat on with his head doggedly bent, his ears still burning. His stubby little-boy fingers clenched tightly around his chewed pen, went on listing the towns of Victoria in his geography book, but his mind continued to abuse the teacher.

What did she think she knew about shooting? Oh, how he wished he had never put that in his composition! What did she have to read it out for, anyway? *On Saturday I took the gun out by myself . . .*

The sudden strange temptation to put words on blank white paper. *What did you do on Saturday?* What had he wanted to do with all his soul? Take the gun out by himself. Walk across the pad-

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Explorer

By FRANCIS GIBBETT

IN the ordinary course of his duties in the Territories, Mr. Francis Augustus Tibbetts, Lieutenant of His Majesty's Third Regiment of Houssas—Bones, to his intimates—performed feats of valour and endurance which should have sufficed most men greedy for that inner satisfaction which comes from the possession of such qualities, but to Bones the undoubted heroism of his chasing an aggressive army of a thousand spears with half a dozen scarlet-tarbooshed Houssas and a machine-gun was just part of the day's work.

On those occasions when he went upstream in the *Zaire* without either of his superiors he permitted himself his dreams of greatness and of all his dreams the most splendid was when he saw himself as a successful explorer. Bones knew his Rider Haggard, indeed he could have quoted whole chunks of *Allan Quatermain*, and the idea of his being the man to rediscover some lost civilisation was one which ravished his simple soul. He had long cherished the thought of such a discovery which would, as he saw it, carry him inevitably to the platform of the Royal Geographical Society, an eminence which above all others he desired to attain.

One morning at breakfast at the Residency, Mr. Tibbetts was holding forth upon his favourite subject. Neither Sanders nor Hamilton paid very much attention to him, for the breakfast was particularly bad that morning, the porridge being burnt and the eggs almost raw. Bones, absorbed by what he was talking about, shovelled the almost unedible porridge into his capacious mouth unnoticing. He would have eaten powdered cement splinkled with hyssop and moistened with turpentine and not noticed the difference.

"As I was sayin', sir and respected Excellency and jolly old Ham . . ."

In his eagerness to make his points Bones had not bothered to swallow what was in his mouth and a small gobbet of the ineffable porridge was expelled across the table into the saucer of Hamilton's cup. The Captain of Houssas closed his eyes and looked faint.

"I have already relegated my porridge to the limbo of forgotten things, Bones," he said quietly. "Please don't give me yours."

With the aid of two white men, Mr. Commissioner Sanders ruled over countless West African subjects. In that dark land of queer beliefs and strange magics, even a cast in the eye can give a man an advantage over his fellows.

Bones looked astonished, went rather red and saluted violently with the hand which held his porridge-spoon, an action which flung an even larger missile on to the piece of toast and marmalade which his superior was raising to his mouth.

"What are you indulging in, you clumsy oaf?" snarled Hamilton. "Forcible feeding?"

"Sorry, Ham, old boy, the quickness of the hand deceives the jolly old spoon." He turned to Sanders who, absorbed in his own thoughts, scarcely noticed his junior's appalling table manners. "Now I have a dinky little idea, jolly old Excellency, that somewhere or other there must be a fearful lot of those naughty old Roman johnnies hoppin' about in the Territories an' what would you say if poor old Bones found 'em?"

"All this and porridge too," groaned Hamilton. "Bones, you goop, there isn't any unexplored land left in Africa."

To Hamilton's surprise and Bones' delight Sanders cut in and said, "I don't think I should be as dogmatic as that, Hamilton."

Bones stood up so suddenly that his chair crashed over backwards and he seized and shook the astonished Commissioner's hand violently. He then abruptly sat down where his chair wasn't.

When some sort of order had been restored Sanders went on: "There seems to be a certain amount of country which could hardly be described as explored. There are the Green Lands, beyond the N'Gombi which as far as I know have never been crossed. At a rough estimate they must stretch for at least five hundred square miles. Then the Old King's country is really *terra incognita*. It's true the Portuguese sent a deputation to him but if it learnt anything it didn't bring the information back for the Old King politely accepted their presents and sent their pickled heads back to Portuguese territory. Personally I don't believe in the possibility of a lost civilisation, but I can't altogether discount the idea. You remember the 'Ghosts of brass' in the Isisi? And the business we all experienced of the Akasava idol which turned out to be a statue of Mercury? Then there are the remains of that viaduct to the north of the Bulfafa which certainly was never native-built or even Arab. After all, no one *does* know where the Lost Legions of Augustus got to."

"I realise all that, sir," said Hamilton, "but Bones expects to find cities of stone peopled by exquisite white maidens."

As Bones crossed the parade ground to his hut after breakfast he was unaware of the heat of the oven-like floor which burnt into the soles of his boots, for he was still wrapped about by his dream, but he would have been considerably astonished had he known that there were two men who were already working towards the realisation of his dream. One of them was a hypercivilised gentleman sometime of Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, a product of Eton and the Sorbonne, the other an almost naked black man who believed in devils, strange gods and similar magics.

O'FELI of the Inner N'Gombi was a hateful one and he lived not within the confines of the village to which he was native and where he had been born, but more than six spear-throws from the nearest hut. That O'Feli was a devil man was plain for all to see, for his right eye looked in a certain strange and wonderful manner and this is a notorious attribute. Now and then in any community, be it in London or Paris or the upper reaches of the River, there is one born who is anti-social from his birth and filled with malice and all unloving things. Such was O'Feli of the N'Gombi.

He was an unlovely baby and a hideous little boy, and at the age of ten (his father being dead) he walked at dusk one evening into his mother's hut and spoke.

"Woman," he said, "my powers tell me that by the rind of the moon you will be dead and gone down to hell."

"Oh *ko!* That I should live to hear such evil from the son of my man."

It is a fact that with the waning of the moon Tambara, the mother of O'Feli, died, though whether the event was due quite simply to the fever or to some darker agency in which her unpleasant son had had a hand, as was hinted, was never known.

When the women of the village had draped their satiny waists in green leaves and stamped and wailed through the Dance of Mourning, O'Feli accompanied his mother upon her last journey which led to the small island in the river which, in the vernacular, is known as The-Place-of-Lying-Down.

Thereafter he removed himself to the splendid isolation of a hut beyond the confines of the village. He was obliged to go to the Isisi for a wife, for no N'Gombi woman would have looked at him, being fearful of the devil which dwelt in his eye. O'Feli was a rich man by native standards and he was able to buy himself a proper, straight-backed, full-breasted woman of fourteen.

O'Feli was absent for days at a time in the depths of the forest but what he did there was unknown but was also the subject for much speculation. One rumour had it that O'Feli had a hut in the forest where he kept a woman no more than twenty-eight inches high, chained by the leg. If this were true—and it was—it was an abomination, for the People of the River will have no dealings with the bushmen, regarding the shy little forest-dwellers as something less and something more than human. Moreover, the pygmies discouraged any intrusion upon their privacy with tiny bows and tinier blowpipes, all of which propelled missiles the scratch of which was death, for the little people of the forest were cunning in the use of tetanus.

Now, no matter how foolish the N'Gombi may have been in attributing magical powers to O'Feli because of the appalling cast in his eye, he undoubtedly had one attribute, which was his particular mystery. He had the gift of walking-two-ways. This was, quite simply, a phenomenal bump of locality coupled with an unusually keen nose. It was said, with wonder, in his village, that that way which O'Feli has walked he can walk again. In other words, he could invariably find his way back.

From the tiny woman in the forest he learned the secrets of the five vegetable poisons known only to the bushmen. Armed with this knowledge he proceeded to grow rich.

One evening at dusk, O'Feli paused before the hut of Buloko the fisherman. At the man's side his wife was grinding mealie-corn and she shifted uneasily under the eye of the devil man.

"I see you, Buloko," said O'Feli, "but behold it will not be long before I shall not see you."

The fisherman hunched his shoulders and spat to the left and the right—just in case.

"I see you, O'Feli," he returned; "now you shall tell me what your words mean, for it enters into my stomach that there is no comfort in them for me."

"That is so," nodded O'Feli. And the fisherman's wife put her knuckles to her teeth in perturbation.

"My power which dwells in my eye," went on O'Feli, "has a brother who lives in the tree-tops with the *n'kema-n'kema*, the monkey people, who bring him splendid food in their little hands. And, Buloko, he is of a certain magic colour such as you have never seen. Moreover, he has three ears and one foot which is turned backwards. Now, Buloko, this power has spoken to his brother and all the brethren whisper to each other is known to me. Now this is what they have said, that before the season of the year when goats grow restless you will know the fever and be food for the fishes in hell."

"*O ko!*" gasped the fisherman, while his wife fell writhing in a fit at his side.

"Yet," added O'Feli significantly, "you may live if you will."

"Tell me that which I must do," said Buloko hoarsely.

"Make me your emissary, Buloko, and I will go into the forest and reason with this terrible ghost. But," he added, "the way is long and most tiring to my lovely feet. Again, if I am away I shall lose, for my goats will go untended and my crops pine for my presence."

"O'Feli," said the fisherman eagerly, "such losses as you know I will repay."

"Such as fifty brass rods and two goats," suggested O'Feli.

"Surely the journey to this ghost of yours is a long one?" grumbled Buloko. "Now it seems to me that I might as well be dead as ruined. Twenty-five brass rods and one goat," he bargained.

They settled on twenty-five brass rods and two goats and Buloko the fisherman lived.

EMBOLDENED by this success, O'Feli next stood before the chief of his village.

"O chief, I see you," he said, "and the brother of my devil has foreseen your death."

Now, Nakumo had been made headman of the village by Sandi himself and was a sensible man, believing only in his own tribal devils and M'Shimba - M'Shamba, the Green One. He regarded O'Feli unlovingly and was unmoved by the other's pronouncement.

"And if I would live, O'Feli?" he asked dangerously, "I must send you as my other-self and give you splendid presents against the time of your journeying?"

"Chief, that is so," nodded O'Feli and started back a pace as the other came swiftly to his feet.

"Now it enters into my belly," said Nakumo, "that you are a cunning one. Behold, Buloko was a fool but I am not a fool, being placed in my high place by Sandi Ingonda himself and wearing the splendid disc which he placed about my neck with his own pretty hands." He touched the big medal of office which bore the likeness of a certain bearded king. "Now this I say to you, O'Feli, and speaking to your teeth, you may go and wrestle with ghosts, devils and similar magics on my behalf but when you return there will be no brass rods and no splendid goats which once talked prettily within the shadow of my hut."

Within three days the village knew such fear as it had not before experienced for Nakumo, the chief, died in a manner which was wonderful to see, the back of his head resting upon his heels.

O'Feli, together with the rest of the village, was an interested spectator of the event and he was not above making capital of the incoherent and dolorous sounds which came from the dying chief's tortured lips.

"Behold," said the devil man in the bland manner of a lecturer addressing the uninitiated, "all men may hear my great ghost speaking lovingly to Nakumo as he takes him."

Thereafter when O'Feli's devil prophesied disaster men paid and paid promptly and in the space of three moons O'Feli grew wondrous rich so that the woman, his wife, went with twelve brass rings upon each leg and eight more upon her slim arms.

It was, however, a tactical error upon O'Feli's part to pick upon the chief of his village to assist in launching his successful business, for the event came to the ears of Ahmet, the chief of Sanders' spies who sat upon the N'Gombi-Ochori border near the Creek of Crocodiles.

It was Bones who extended his finger one morning to the tired little carrier-pigeon as she dropped down in ever-decreasing circles. He took her gently to the pigeon-loft so that she might drink and rest after her long and hazardous journey through hawk-infested skies. Sergeant Abiboo at his side looked knowingly at the tired little messenger and nodded.

"This, Master," he said, "is Mimi, the fastest of all the moaning-birds. Now, Ahmet has tidings of import it seems to me."

Bones nodded and gentled the pigeon as, with careful hands, he took the rubber ring from about the little grey leg. Abiboo took the tiny missive and doubled across to Sanders' office. His right hand went up to his tarboosh and he said: "Master, here is a message from Ahmet the chief of the eyes of government. And, Master, it is the soft grey one, Mimi, who brings it. Now it is written in the Sura of the Leaf: 'The swiftest messengers are ever those who bear ill-tidings.' Therefore, Master, read now."

The Commissioner unrolled the tiny piece of flimsy paper inscribed in Ahmet's clear-cut Arabic characters:

To Sandi the Wise and Strong in his fine house by the River-with-One-Bank.

Greetings and upon you peace. Nakumo of the Inner N'Gombi has died the death,

a death prophesied by O'Feli of his village. Now O'Feli prophesies much and often and he grows rich averting evil. I declare that I follow the one true God but am your servant.

From Ahmet beside the Creek of Crocodiles.

Sanders swore violently in Arabic, a tongue which lends itself to the niceties of vituperation, for Nakumo had been a good chief and a reliable man if comparatively unimportant.

"Bones," said Sanders at tiffin that day, "I want you to go up to Umbelosi in the Inner N'Gombi. It's a case of suspected poisoning. You'd better take the *Wiggle*. You'd never get the *Zaire* through the tributaries at this time of year. Take a platoon with you and a Maxim though I don't think it will come to that."

And Bones went rejoicing upon his way, his head filled with dreams of territorial discovery and — for it must be admitted that Hamilton was quite right — strange cities peopled principally by young ladies of tender age, all of whom resembled a certain fair cousin of his.

Unfortunately for his mission, however, the gossip man in the Ochori rattled out on his hollow tree-trunk the story of the passing of Tibbetti in his fine *puc-a-puc*. The news was picked up by the gossip-man of the swamp people and relayed to the Inner N'Gombi. Thus it was that O'Feli had some three days' warning of the coming of the son of Sandi —this supposed relationship was accepted throughout the Territories—and decided that he would flourish better elsewhere. Though O'Feli had a devil ghost who lived in the tree-tops, he had not the slightest wish to hang from one of those same trees.

Bones was suitably annoyed to discover that his quarry had gone, read the village a homily in his beautiful Bomongo upon good behaviour, appointed Nakumo's brother to be chief, and turned the nose of the *Wiggle* once more downstream.

MANOEL DA SILVA was a fortunate youth. It might be said that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth save that in his case it would certainly have been pure platinum set with precious stones. He was rich beyond the dreams of avarice and even such giants of affluence as the Nizam, John D. Rothschild or the Aga Khan recognised his existence.

The trading house of Da Silva had been founded in 1756 by old Gomez of that name. Gomez Da Silva had prospered in the carrying trade upon all the sea routes then known, and had amassed a comfortable fortune, which his son and his grandson and his great-grandson and so on right up to Manoel's father, increased.

It was soon after the end of the Napoleonic Wars that the house of Da Silva found it more convenient to transact their multifarious businesses through the one clearing-house, and the old banking establishment of Mellilo passed into their hands and is known to this day in Lombard Street under the title of Da Silva's Bank. The acquisition of their estates in Brazil more than doubled the family's fortune. They had the Midas touch and their big Brazilian estates produced yellow diamonds and emeralds in seemingly endless quantities. Though Portuguese by nationality, the family had become almost international. It is true that their principal palace was at Estoril not far from the Portuguese capital, but they were as much at home in their houses in Park Lane, the Bois de Boulogne, Riverside Drive or the colossal and immensely hideous house near the Tiergarten.

Manoel Da Silva's father died within six months of his son's birth. He was a sickly boy given to sudden inexplicable rages and long brooding silences. The son of a merchant prince, his tutors were hand-picked until he went to Eton where he was exceedingly unpopular, and found the scions of British aristocracy uncouth animals with whom to associate. From Eton the scheme of his education carried him across the Channel to Paris, where he studied at the Sorbonne for some two years. He studied other things in the French capital besides the ancient philosophies which he was supposed to be reading, and there might have been a nasty scandal in connection with the young American girl who drowned herself in the Seine after one of his parties in the palatial flat on the Quai d'Orsay, which he rented while in France.

Something, however, of his studies at the Sorbonne must have clung, for he developed an affection for the old classical ideas and indeed the classical way of life. He affected to despise the civilisation in which he lived and which had provided him with his immeasurable wealth. A scandal at last overtook him after a party at his great rambling white house on the Portuguese coast.

On this occasion someone, a girl, had the bad taste to die while actually attending the party. There was much and hurried telephoning to Manoel's cousin who was a high official in the Ministry of the Interior, and the whole thing might have been satisfactorily glossed over but for the fact that the Chief of Police in Lisbon was an upright man. More important, perhaps, he wasn't the cousin of anyone. He acted with promptitude and resource and Manoel, for all his millions, found himself before the beak. He was committed to two years without the option — it was a scandalous affair — and went from the court lamenting, to the extreme discomfort of a Portuguese prison.

That settled it. At the end of nineteen months (a part of his sentence was remitted for good behaviour) he was met at the prison doors by a Hispano-Suiza with two chauffeurs in his plum-coloured livery and whisked away from under the noses of the clustering reporters. He grossly exceeded the speed limit to his house at Estoril and a too-enterprising newspaper man who followed on a motor cycle was thrown through the window of the fourth drawing-room by "Pug" O'Brien, Manoel's tame bruiser. Thereafter he turned his elegant back upon civilisation and Fifth Avenue, Bond Street and the Promenade des Anglais knew him no more. It required only a few years to efface his memory from the butterfly creatures who revolved about him, though it was remarked that a certain number of them seemed to have gone out of circulation about the same time as the multi-millionaire's disappearance.

BEFORE O'Feli of the N'Gombi fled in front of lank vengeance in the person of Mr. Francis Augustus Tibbetts he did two things which he felt necessary to his safety. By night he went to the river's bank and scooped out handfuls of the thick clayey mud. This he kneaded until it was of the consistency suitable to his purpose and, returning to his hut, he laid this firmly over his wife's face so that she died without a sound. Then, taking his spears, he went by the path known only to him to the lonely hut in the forest. There was the rattle of a leg-chain at his coming and Ch'ki, the tiny woman from whom he had learned his poison secrets, rose to her little height.

"Speak well of me to all ghosts and devils," said O'Feli conventionally, and the woman's minute hands went round the haft of the spear as he struck with a sure arm.

Thereafter O'Feli went towards the east with some rapidity and moving by secret paths such as he alone knew. He came at length to the Green Lands, which are a vast expanse of marsh and semi-swamp, notoriously the breeding place of devils and, by popular belief, the home of M'Shimba-M'Shamba whose other name, the Green One, is supposedly derived from this part of the world. Picking his way delicately, his practised eye warned him of those stretches which could easily engulf a man, he crossed this lonely and desolate stretch of country until he came to a land where there was a white man who spoke with a tongue other than Inglesi, and he knew that here he had found safety and was beyond the justice of Sandi.

In the course of time he fell in with one Abdul Hafiz, an enterprising Zanzibari, to whom distance was nothing in the pursuit of profit. This amiable Arab was seeking fresh fields for his enterprise, for even the Portuguese authorities frown upon the dissemination of gin among their subject races, especially when the gin in question is guaranteed pure, one hundred per cent genuine methylated spirit with a small admixture of sugar.

"Now it seems to me, O N'Gombi man," said Abdul, sitting cross-legged before his little silken tent one evening, "that your people will pay great riches for the lovely water I sell."

"That is so, Arabi," agreed O'Feli.

"Now if I go into the country beyond the Green Lands," suggested Abdul, "this Sandi who has long ears like a pig will know of my coming and will be quick to punish, for he is a hater of the waters of pleasure which I sell. Therefore, O man, you will take my lovely bottles to Sandi's land as my other self and, behold, we will grow rich together."

It was not long before the news of this trading reached the ears of Bosambo of the Ochori. He made certain discreet enquiries—very discreet, since the man he questioned—using a heated spear-blade—he took a long way into the forest so that his screams should be inaudible to his village. He then sent a message by carrier-pigeon to Sanders who swore violently in Bo-

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The Flower in the Jungle

PART TWO

AN hour later they were over Finjan airfield. The little Assamese town of Tinsukia, a few miles away, was the only sign of life in the neighbourhood. All around the field stretched mile upon mile of tea; little green, frustrated trees, doomed never to grow more than a few feet above the ground before being savagely pruned back into shape.

An Aldis lamp winked a green eye skywards and they came in to land. Once again, to his surprise, the problem solved itself, and they were coasting smoothly along the runway, the shadow of the Dak sliding along in front of them.

At the far end he stopped and waited. The field, officially, had been out of action for almost a year, and there seemed little point in taxying a mile across it until they found out where the reception committee had stationed itself.

The committee-of-one appeared in a jeep, with the words "Follow Me" painted across its rear, and they lumbered along behind it, an elephant chasing a mouse. They passed a row of dishevelled hangars, and outside the last one the driver stood up and signalled them to cut engines.

It was not until the three of them were sitting around a wooden table in one of the huts, eating an evening meal of curry and rice, that Chris managed to have a good look at him. He was fat and Anglo-Burman, dressed in an American Army shirt with a Burmese lonji wrapped round his waist. His name, it transpired was Ferguson, and in keeping with it, there was a bottle of real Scotch in the cupboard. This, with singular generosity, he produced.

The measures he poured were also generous, and after the second one, and with a third in the offing, Chris decided to mention refuelling.

"Don't worry about that, old boy. We'll do it in the morning."

"I'd prefer it done now," said Chris. "You can get an awful lot of condensation in one of those tanks if you leave it half empty overnight."

"That'll be O.K. We can drain them in the morning before we refuel. They'll be nearly empty, anyway."

Confronted by this piece of reasoning, he gave up the argument.

An hour later the three of them turned in—Oliver and Chris on two camp beds in Ferguson's little office, and Ferguson himself in the small room which led off it.

Chris was soon asleep, though at first the complete silence, after the noise of Calcutta, was a bit distracting. Even the wind lay still.

Once off the runway and safely airborne, Chris set the controls for climbing. God: what a relief to be away from Finjan. Poor old Ferguson. Heaven only knew what monstrosity would be detailed to welcome them to Kweiyang. Probably, as it was the end of the run, the reception committee would be enormous. Score upon score of Chinamen in lend-lease jeeps would descend upon them, wildly souveniring everything moveable—parachutes, stepladder, chocks, maps, radio; no, they had no radio.

Within a very few minutes, and while still climbing, they came to the first tentative slopes of the Naga Hills. Soft

Two reckless men in a stolen plane on their way to a mysterious destination. Begin their adventures now.

and green, the little mounds swept by beneath them, the shadow of the aircraft slithering up and down their sides. By leaning out of the cockpit Chris could see the shadow, thousands of feet below and to their left. Strangely flexible, it sniffed along on its belly, chasing the contour of the hills, like a monstrous winged dachshund.

The feminine curves gave way gradually to sharp outcrops of grey rock, and a jagged irregularity, crest superimposed on crest, which reared thousands of feet up into the sky. Chris altered course slightly to miss a peak, and they passed it, a hundred yards to their left, with a crest towering five hundred feet above them.

They were still climbing when the mountains sloped down again to the flat plain of the Hukawng Valley. A network of muddy streams laced the Burmese countryside into an intricate pattern of green, brown and orange, with here and there a little bamboo village snuggled into the elbow of a stream.

They levelled out at 12,000 and the Kumon Mountains leapt at them from across the valley. Here again Chris was forced into an alteration of course for a minute or two to escape a vicious granite crest, level with them and glittering in the sunlight. He passed a hand over his forehead and felt it damp again. For a straight course from Finjan to Kweiyang, a safe minimum would be about 18,000; without oxygen, however, there seemed little point in crawling up there to giggle foolishly and wake up with a harp in one hand and a control column in the other.

A mile or so to their left they passed the little town of Sumprabum, smugly civilised under its red tin roofs. Perched on the Eastern foothills of the Kumon, it was set in a patch of vivid green grass that extended half a mile or so above and below the settlement, before it quite abruptly turned into jungle. A motor road wound southward among the hills, but there was no transport on it and no sign of life in the town.

A few miles further on they crossed the Irrawaddy. With the monsoon still a month off, the water had fallen, exposing a thick golden vein of sand with a thin blue centre, which threaded itself through the green of the jungle. The country east of the river seemed more fertile. Perhaps there were just more people. Dotted over the whole area were clearings, some with crops growing in them, others full of little bamboo houses balanced precariously on stilts. Here again there were countless little waterways, some with a mirrored trickle that flung back the daylight, others, only sand and stone.

They crossed the Nmai Hka River, feeding into the Irrawaddy, and the confluence of the two, a few miles to the south, was just visible between the hills. From here onwards the terrain rose sharply, and Chris altered course again as 15,000 feet of rock lurched up at them. The movement of the sun had now pushed the aircraft's shadow in front of them, and it sprinted double-jointedly up and down the foothills of the China border. As they flew eastward and the hills rose to meet them, the huge black shape, sometimes only a hundred feet below, kept in front and gradually increased its lead.

Oliver pointed ahead and Chris nodded. He'd seen the airfield nearly five minutes before, with its two brown

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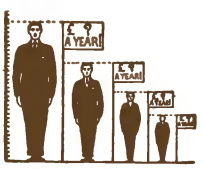

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runways carved across the green. Too tired to comment.

Exhausted, but still startled by the panorama before them. About a dozen fighters were dispersed around the aerodrome, some under camouflage nets, some in the open, but more than half of them glistening with the virgin brilliance of unpainted metal. Two Dakotas, both unpainted, squatted on the tarmac in front of a large, partially camouflaged hangar set in from the east-west runway. The other runway, approximately north-south, was under construction or repair. Both were steel matting.

No sooner were they safely on the ground and halted outside the hangars than his worst fears were realised. Men appeared from nowhere and converged at speed. Four of them fought with each other to open the fuselage door, and another dozen milled around behind, waiting to hurl themselves in when it was unlocked. All were dressed in Indian Army khaki. Some were barefoot, others wore boots or canvas shoes, and two of them sported American tin hats.

"Is that door locked, Ollie?"

"Yes."

"Leave it that way until we get some sense out of these people."

They sat tight while the hubbub around them rose in pitch and volume as more Chinese deserted their jobs on the runway and came running over. Some stood below the engines and shouted up at them. One little man in a tin hat hung on to the under-carriage leg and jumped up and down on the tire, laughing. A voice shouted "cigarettes!" and there was more laughter.

At last a figure of importance appeared and the others dispersed.

"Hello," it shouted up at them. "Good trip, yes?"

"Yes," smiled Chris out of the window. "Good trip, yes."

"Good," said the figure of importance, leaning back on its heels. "Very good. Very good."

"Splendid," said Chris. "May we come out now, please?"

"Oh yes, oh yes, please do. And please bring all things personal before the men taking." The figure smiled from ear to ear and waggled its close-cropped head in a knowing, boys - will - be - boys gesture.

When they were down on the tarmac the figure introduced itself as Captain Chong "of the Armament Supply."

"Follow me to your quarters. Perhaps you are meeting friends there."

God forbid, thought Chris.

The three of them walked briskly over to a long, squat building, built American-fashion of wooden posts and mosquito netting. It was obviously new and had been pushed up against the side of the hangar to shield it from the direct heat of the sun. Captain Chong stepped out smartly in front, a lithe little figure, dwarfed by the lanky six-footers at his heels. He flung open the door of the building and it shot off its hinges and collapsed into the room.

"Leave that God damn door alone," muttered a voice.

Captain Chong beamed and bent over to pick it up. "You see, there are other English peoples here, too."

The five men and a girl playing dice on the floor looked up, then resumed their game.

"Well, well," said Captain Chong. "I will leave you with the English peoples."

A FACE looked up from the game.

"Hello — and hello. Just chuck your things in the corner and we'll be with you, soon as we finish. There's some stuff to read on the table."

They walked across the room and threw their duffle-bags on the floor against one of the supporting posts. Dotted around the netting were pictures clipped from magazines and pinned in place on the walls. The table was an upturned wooden crate; two unreliable-looking deck chairs slouched against one of its sides, and half a dozen other chairs of assorted sizes were spread about the wooden floor. A pot-bellied stove occupied a large part of the floor space. Although unlit, it had a boxfull of wood and a bucketful of ashes beside it as proof of its powers. On top of it sat a saucepan, half full of anonymous brown fluid.

Oliver dug down in his bag and produced a new packet of cigarettes. His hands trembled slightly as he tore off the cellophane, and, as he reached for a cigarette, Chris's did the same. They both laughed.

"Anything wrong?"

"No. quite O.K., thanks. Just a little light-headed after our excursion."

"Aren't we all? Aw, ta hell with this game. You guys carry on while I show the new men round."

The figure untangled itself from the group on the floor and came up to them. The eyes and hair were dark and the teeth flashed white as he smiled.

"Vic Grasselli's the name. I'm a Roman from Brooklyn. Pleased to meet you both."

"This is Oliver Sturges and I'm Chris Lyle."

"Swell—swell. Now I'll just point out the others to you. They're so busy losing money to each other they won't be able to answer back. The one you're both looking at is Liz Kramer—New York. She was nursing in the American hospital in Shanghai. She can tell you the rest, if you're interested."

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The girl looked up and smiled. She had short, corn-coloured hair — and she was very pretty.

There was no doubt about the man sitting, hunched up on the floor, at her right. Chris gave an involuntary groan as he spotted him. The scar still ran across the head from side to side and the corners of the thick, blue lips were drawn down.

"We've met Michael Wu—sort of," said Oliver.

Wu looked up, scowled, and resumed the game.

"So much for our ray of sunshine," Grasselli went on. "The guy on the other side of Liz is an Englishman like yourselves — Arthur Gage."

A fat, red face looked up and grinned. It was ovoid in shape, widest just below the ears, and topped by a thin, black and shiny layer of hair, parted just off centre. A little slit of mouth opened, like a feeding goldfish.

"How do you do?"

"And that backside pointing at us is English, too. Dick McIntyre."

A pair of ex-R.A.F. handlebar moustaches swung round on them. "May God presairve you ignorant colonial! I come frae Glasgow. Greetings."

"And finally, the little guy is Red Connolly. Brooklyn, too."

Red was busy throwing dice.

"Like to walk round a bit? I'll show you the place and tell you what the score is."

They stepped out through the broken doorway into the golden, dust-filled haze of the aerodrome.

"If you two haven't got a good reason for staying behind, you're in luck. We've got an Anson for Finjan tomorrow." He looked at them quizzically. "I may add that the only good reason I know of is travelling in the Anson, too."

Oliver laughed. "She is, is she? Then I, for one, have no desire whatsoever to stay here. Home, James."

"Nor have I," said Chris. "Aren't there any formalities about the kite we brought over—or are we free to push off any time we like?"

"Nope—no formalities. You got paid for the run—or did you?"

"Yes, we did."

"Well, then, you can scram any time you like. Except the only way to get off this damn hilltop is by air. It must be a month's walk to the nearest town. They organise a return trip for ferry pilots every couple of weeks—every time they get a plane load."

Apart from forty or fifty Chinese working on the runway, the place was deserted. The control tower was an elementary wooden scaffolding with a canvas roofed platform at the top, and this was empty.

"Have a look at this."

Grasselli led them over the runway and across two hundred yards of grass to a precipice. The edge was fringed with tall grass, and the impression gained in the approach to it was of a gentle slope on the other side.

"Great Scot! You don't expect this, do you? You don't even notice it coming in from the air."

"No, you don't, because it's in the shadow. Like to jump?"

There was a sheer drop of about a thousand feet. Looking down, they saw a granite ledge with a few shrubs clinging perilously to it. From the ledge downward, the slope became more gradual and rolled down another thousand feet to a moss-filled valley with a stream trickling through. On the other side of the valley, perhaps half a mile across, there were immense boulders, some of them fifty feet thick, piled high against the base of another cliff. This one rose in three cruel, vertical stages to a peak a few hundred feet below the level of the plateau.

"It's a bit strange coming in here the first time, I guess. We're eight thousand feet up and you can get the damndest cross-winds and pressure gradients up here. There's a boy who had trouble."

He waved an arm down to where the valley narrowed between the two cliffs and the stream disappeared behind the rock. Two thousand feet below them lay the remains of an aircraft. It had hit the far cliff and dropped to the bottom. An entire silver wing glistened like a splinter of broken glass on one of the ledges, six or seven hundred feet above the rest of it.

"Nice kid. Weismann. Member of a pretty well-organised gang. They'll buy or steal anything you want and deliver it all in one piece — or try to. He'd done this run three or four times when he got into a bit of trouble on the runway and shot off over the edge. There's no way down — except that one — so there he stays."

"How many times have you done this run yourself?"

"Me? Oh—this must be my fifth trip. About the last one, too. To hell with it; I've got enough dough."

THEY got back to the hut just as a Chinese lad was unloading eight plates of stew from a tray on to the table. As he picked each plate up, he inserted a large flat thumb into the stew, put the plate down on the table, licked his thumb and stuck it into the next one. The others were already seated round the crate at a distance of three or four feet from it, taking their plates as they were put down, and eating from their laps. The newcomers pulled up chairs and sat down, and the red-faced Arthur Gage smiled up at them. It was a furtive, nervous gesture, and his eyes fell down from their faces and glanced hurriedly at the others. They were large, protruding, blood-shot eyes, awkward and unwieldy like a pair of hands, hands that ache to be put in pockets and forgotten.

After supper Grasselli showed them to their sleeping quarters. Four bamboo bashas had been erected behind the mess hut. These were a scant ten feet square; two of them already contained a pair of cots, the third and fourth held one each. Chris was put with McIntyre, while Oliver's cot was deftly inserted between those of Gage and Michael Wu. Grasselli and Connolly occupied another basha and Liz Kramer the fourth.

Lying awake, Chris listened to the wind swirling about the plateau. McIntyre, oblivious, snored loudly at his side, taking the air in shuddering little gasps and exhaling it in a high-pitched moan through the foliage of his moustache. The wind had pushed aside a little section of the bamboo wall, and it flapped to and fro, alternately framing and concealing the half of a brilliant ivory moon. He moved slightly to see whether it was really only half a moon. The full moon stared him in the face

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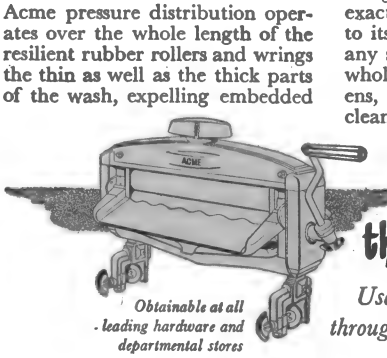

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and he rolled back into a more comfortable position. They might as well have landed, somewhat off course, on the moon itself, for all the feeling of earthliness one had on this plateau.

This windy aircraft carrier, set in a sea of green! Was it real? Could this hearty, mustachioed Glaswegian exist in the flesh? He leant over and touched a hairy shoulder. McIntyre missed a beat, then snorted twice and caught up the rhythm. Probably it was the altitude that made their bizarre surroundings all the stranger.

The transition from the ordered, humdrum life of a European in Calcutta to a role a thousand miles and a world away as a professional arms smuggler was a bit sudden. Were Barrington-Smith and the others, smugly complacent in their Tollygunge bungalows, with their racehorses and their servants, were they really so different from McIntyre, Gage, Grasselli—and Liz Kramer? This vivid little blonde, could one see her having tea at the Saturday Club in Calcutta, chattering brightly with rounded vowels and pointed little finger to Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Jones, and that dear old Miss Robinson who refused to wear dentures? A difficult comparison. Grasselli on the tennis court in cream-coloured flannels? Perhaps. McIntyre, the ends of his moustache just visible from behind, leaning over a table at Firpo's to pour champagne into the glass opposite? Yes, probably. Gage, the nervous red face and the hot, wandering eyes, entertaining an Indian business man to lunch at the Great Eastern?

Yes, yes, why not? All of them were normal people of various sorts, normal as the average man is average; all of them, with the probable exception of the girl, adventurers in search of money or a thrill, or both. Only the plateau of Kweiyang with its ceaseless, moaning wind, its corona of green-clad and snow-tipped mountains, and its thin, clear air — only Kweiyang made them different.

A THICK brown wind skated over the runway. Chris could see it coming and he ran for the open doorway of the Anson, the duffle-bag over his shoulder punting him vigorously in the back with every step. He just reached the step of the aircraft as the whirlwind wrapped him in its embrace and blotted out everything in a dense khaki fog that bit at his eyelids and spat in his ears. The aircraft door slammed shut in his face with a muffled oath from within, and he sat down blindly on the duffle-bag and waited for the wind to pass over.

In a moment it was gone, scurrying across the airfield, irresponsibly here and there, like a naughty child. He opened the door, brushed himself down with his hand and entered the plane, sitting down in the only vacant place, at the rear and just behind Grasselli. Just across the narrow passageway from them sat McIntyre, poised for sleep, and in front of him, bent double and fumbling with a shoe lace, was Gage. The next pair of seats forward was occupied by Wu on the left of the aircraft, staring out through the window into the dust of the aerodrome, and on the right, little Red Connolly, buried in a book.

Forward of the rest and roaring at each other across the aisle, their words sucked away into the whine of the engine, were Liz Kramer, and, on the right, in front of Red, Oliver. What they'd found, on such short acquaintance, that was worth the shouting, was obscure. Syllables, mangled out of context, clipped and attenuated by the noise of the engine, were flung back inside the cabin to fall, inert and meaningless, in a huddle at the rear.

Chris, fascinated, watched the girl. Something about Oliver was good for a laugh—probably the waving thatch of yellow hair which had remained obstinately vertical since Calcutta—and she half-turned round in her seat to tap Wu on the shoulder. As she did so, a little gust of air through the small centre hole in the window caught her own blonde hair and tossed it up over her head and into her eyes. She was wearing a khaki shirt and trousers of American olive drab, the shirt open at the neck and showing a light brown triangle of sunburn.

Why the hell did the pilot insist on revving engines flat out for five minutes? Couldn't hear oneself think, couldn't see through the window for dust.

She was pretty, though. It was a face full of stubborn strength and yet the short, regular features were almost babylike when they laughed. She was young to be a nurse. Or perhaps the Americans chose them that way. Ten marks biology, twenty marks the retrousse nose, thirty marks general nursing, forty marks a shape like that, total one hundred, well done, nurse, you're in, next please. Probably as good a system as any. Of course, the British had had their human side, too—QAIMNS for stark, unadorned efficiency; VADS for glamour.

She was pointing excitedly out of her window now. The aircraft was moving slowly up the runway and the dust that had choked them at its verge was billowing away behind. In a moment they would leave China, apart from Michael Wu and a Chinese pilot and navigator, behind. In a few hours they would have re-crossed the rivers of Burma and be touching down at Finjan.

And that would be that. Back to Calcutta, somehow or other, the others going their various ways. Liz would probably have to go to Calcutta, too, if she was on her way to the States.

They were coming down the runway now, gathering speed. The tail lifted. Yawning alongside them, two hundred yards off, but none too far, was the ravine. As the wheels relaxed their grip and they rose, it gaped wider and wider. There, below them, was the silvered wreckage of the aircraft at its foot. Already the runway was a narrow strip of metal — the one at right angles to it had slipped away into the dust. The Chinese lad was climbing hard. Chris yawned and closed his eyes.

HE was in a ship; a big ship. A troopship. He was inspecting midday dinners on the troop deck. As he came to each table, the eight airmen round it—four men in singlets facing four others—dropped their voices and looked at him. Any complaints? It was difficult to appear interested and sympathetic, even though one was. The terrific heat on the troop-deck made any spontaneity impossible. At least these poor revils in their singlets, squatting down below the hammocks they tried to sleep in, at least they were dressed for the occasion. His shirt, five minutes ago so dry, now clung soggily to his body and the sweat ran down from the inside of his peaked cap, down through the little gap over each temple where it didn't quite fit.

They were good lads, though. Stuffed down in the hold like animals, they still managed to preserve a sense of humour. Here was old Christmas again, asking if they liked what he'd put in their stockings. They liked Chris. That stew O.K., Sexton? 'S'orl right, sir. Me old woman's made worse. But I don't like your 'otel, sir. Corporal Sexton grinned gummily and thrust another spoonful into his toothless maw.

If you'll excuse me, sir, I don't agree with the Corporal. It was another voice, rather a deep voice, rather a public-school voice. It was a familiar, hesitant, over-modulated voice. The face was familiar, too. Very red, rather fat, and with large watery, hyper-thyroid eyes. What the devil was the name? It thrust a plate of stew at him, a large thumb embedded in the hot mess. Terrible stuff, sir. Lumpy. The bulging eyes looked up at him and then fell away. I could take the lumps out for you, said Chris, but you'd have no stew left. The other men laughed and he was sorry at having made what they took as a joke at the expense of the red-faced man. What was his name, anyway? Oh hell, it would come back.

The ship twitched violently, and the red-faced man looked

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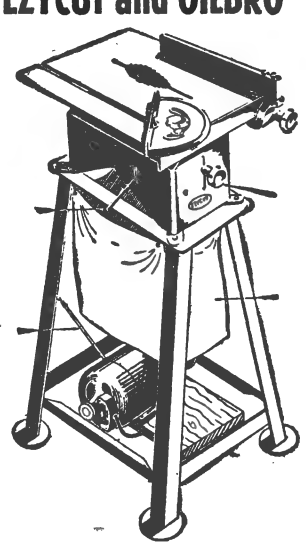

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up again. As he jerked his head up, the lower jaw, held by inertia, sagged and the mouth fell open. Then the head dropped back into its contemplation of stew. In that moment Chris had seen the fear light up in the bulbous eyes and fade away again. It was almost as if the iris had opened wide to display the mind, grey and quivering at the back of it. That was a nasty roll, he said, and the men laughed again. This is supposed to be a lousy place, just where the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean meet. We're due in Durban to-morrow. Then we can stretch our legs. Chris moved on.

The ship was rolling a lot to-day, and several times he only saved himself from capsizing by grabbing one of the overhead hammocks. One man struggled up from the table and forced his way out to the aisle. He got as far as the steel watertight door before he vomited.

Guess he didn't like the stew, sir, said a voice at Chris's elbow. It belonged to a good-looking, olive-skinned and black-haired fellow of about his own age. Must be a Canadian or something. Don't you like it either? he asked. Aw hell, it's O.K., sir. Good, said Chris. He went out through the watertight door, stepping gingerly past where the airman had been sick, and up a steel companionway. The orderly sergeant followed at his heels and they went along D Deck to the sick bay. He pushed open the door and walked in. A couple of patients lay, comfortably propped up on pillows, while the sister bent over the bed of a third one.

How is this fellow, sister? The woman looked up and smiled. She was only a girl, really. A very pretty girl, too, awfully young to be a nursing sister. I guess he'll live. Thought he'd be a bathing beauty and burnt all the skin off his back. The victim grinned. The nurse was a Canadian or an American, or something, too.

Hello, Lyle, said the doctor, appearing suddenly from behind a white canvas screen. Do ye approve of the sick bay? Or are ye sick yersel'? The big man brushed at his heavy moustache with the back of his hand. How do y'like my nursing sister? She's one of those colonials, ha ha. Ha ha, agreed Chris. Glad to know you, sister. My word she was pretty. Funny he hadn't seen her before. Must finish that letter to Eve, though. He went out into the corridor, followed still by the orderly sergeant. That'll do for now, sergeant. I'll meet you for teas.

THEY were lurching about like an angry bull when he woke up. The noise of the engines was still deafening, but somehow the note was wrong. It varied, rather like the wail of a bagpipe drone, with the piper tuning it into his chanter. One of the engines seemed to be idling, and the other one taking the strain.

"It's time you woke up!" shouted Grasselli, turning round. "One of our goddam motors has packed up. He's trying to get a bit of height on the other one."

Chris shook himself and looked out of the window. The starboard airscrew was feathered and pointing straight up and down. The port one, from the sound of it, was far from happy about the situation. Where the devil were they? Certainly nowhere near the route they'd come in the Dak. The ground below them —and not very far below— was a narrow valley, perhaps a quarter of a mile wide at the bottom, with a small river wiggling along it, and trees down almost to the water's edge.

"He's been stooging up this river valley trying to gain height before he has a crack at the hills!" Grasselli roared. "We don't seem to be getting any higher."

"No!" bellowed Chris.

He looked at his watch. Twenty minutes past four; they'd been airborne an hour and a half.

Suddenly Arthur Gage leapt to his feet, stumbled to the front of the cabin and grabbed one of the three parachutes piled up there. They watched, fascinated, as he threw the straps over his shoulder, dropped one, cursed, picked it up again and tried to get the loop up between his legs. A little stream of sweat ran off his forehead on to the floor of the cabin. The navigator looked round, took in the situation at a glance, and shrugged his shoulders. Gage eventually got the parachute on.

"Come on! There's two more. Two of you can be smart, anyway!"

He grabbed the girl with a large red fist and handed her one of the 'chutes. Oliver got up to help her on with it, but she knocked it out of his hand and sat down again. Oliver was remonstrating with her, but she was angry. Her eyes flashed at him, and after a moment or two he sat down himself. Chris got up and went to her.

"Look," he shouted, "I think it'd be a good thing if you put that 'chute on. If we don't get some more height soon we're going to have a crash landing in the river — and that'll be painful. If that's going to happen, it'll be better if you jump."

"Oh, shut up," came the reply. "I mean—I'm sorry. With only three 'chutes here I'm sitting tight. Let somebody else have it. Anyway, I don't want to walk around the jungle by myself. Let *him* do that."

She jerked a thumb at the retreating Arthur Gage, stumbling back to the doorway. The others were following him with their eyes, but not a man moved. He got to the door, feverishly unscrewed the four corners and lowered it down on to the aircraft floor, before he turned round to face the rest of them. He seemed about to speak. The sweating had stopped now, but there was galloping terror in the eyes.

"Go on if you're going, old boy," shouted Chris. "I'm going to throw some of this stuff out after you've gone."

He picked up his duffle-bag and the man jumped.

They looked down through the windows and out the door, but he was out of sight. Chris waited a moment, then threw the duffle-bag. The others silently handed over their own possessions and he heaved them out, one after the other. No one made a move toward the parachutes. Not a man moved to put one on, and Chris decided not to jettison them, even though it was obvious no one would jump. Good for bandages, he reflected grimly.

They were well below the mountain tops now. The ravine hemmed them in on two sides and their rear was cut off by the fact that it was too narrow to turn round. Before them, the river had curved away to the left. The pilot swung away with it, and the port engine, straining into the turn, screamed like a child. They were still losing height, despite the jettisoning of a few hundredweight of personal equipment and one body. One engine was obviously incapable of supporting the Anson in the manner to which it was accustomed—even without a load at all.

"Straps — straps!" came a yell from the front.

The navigator was pointing to his waist, making fastening movements, and Red Connolly, in his first vocal contribution since the previous day, was interpreting, standing in the aisle, hands cupped to his mouth. He stood there, legs braced wide apart, for a moment, then dived back into

(Please turn to page 66)

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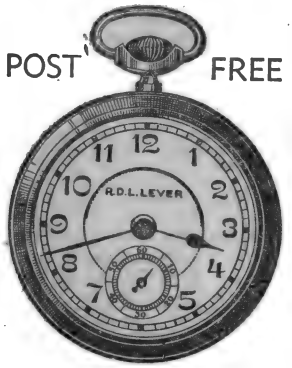

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QUICKSET WITH CURLYPET

The Night of the Storm

(Continued from page 7)

II

BLINDED by the torch, Gina groped for the door handle. Craven seized her by the shoulders. His fingers sank into the muscles like steel claws.

"You're staying here. Too clever, aren't you? Do you think I'll let you go now?"

He wrenched savagely at her, desperate with panic and fury, gasping like a sick man. Gina struck at his face with her clenched fist, and when he caught her wrist, sank her teeth into his hand. Craven whimpered like an animal, and lashed out in frenzy, flinging her from the door to a wall which alone saved her from falling headlong.

Gina suddenly knew that he was mad with terror and from that fact infinitely dangerous. He would kill her for what she knew, just as, for whatever reason, he had killed the man whose body lay out on the roadway.

Suddenly he moved between her and the outer door. There remained the dark corridor. Now, if ever, was the moment. Gina feinted to one side and as instinctively, he jumped to stop her, she slid beneath his outstretched arm and leaped like a wild thing for the passage.

Craven dashed after her, so that the torch he carried lit the way, its beam rushing soundlessly along the grimy walls. A door, partly open, loomed up. Gina pushed through, thrusting it behind her with all her strength. As it slammed, Craven crashed heavily against it.

Gina heard Craven wrench the door open, and a torchlight caught her again, sending her shadow leaping grotesquely ahead, now small and squat as that of a dwarf, now monstrous as any Amazon. To the left a broad staircase ran up into the gloom of the upper floors. Up this she mounted on wings of fear, while Craven called wildly on her to stop. She reached the first turning when he fired.

Startled by the ear-splitting detonation, Gina stumbled, but the worst that happened was a little shower of plaster which pattered down somewhere behind her. As she gained the first floor he fired twice.

Gina realised that she had gained on him, and that his chances of hitting her on the wing, as it were, were remote. Apparently it dawned on Craven, too. He wasted no more time on revolver practice, but started up the stairs, the ray from the torch weaving ahead like the blade from a long sword.

Immediately in front of Gina was the base of a staircase which ran up through the ceiling. She leaped for the lower steps, slipping on the smooth iron, and recovering, ran giddily aloft.

Gina's head brought up against a solid barrier. Swinging crazily around as Craven climbed, the light flashed over her, she saw her way was blocked by a trapdoor over a square hole.

CRAVEN mounted slowly and deliberately while Gina fought the trapdoor until it rose on its hinges like a lid, passed the balance point, and fell backward with a deafening clang. When she struggled through the manhole there was another battle to close it, but she heaved it back with the aid of an iron ring in the centre. It crashed back into place as Craven, tremulous with fatigue, appeared a dozen feet below. He started thrusting from below, but Gina lay across the trapdoor. Her hands encountered a bolt. She shot it home, and rolled exhausted on the dusty floor.

Craven was shouting at her.

"Can you hear me? I want to talk to you. You don't understand! I don't want to hurt you! Why don't you answer?" His tone changed. "All right, you can stop there till you rot."

When she said nothing he fumbled about underneath for a few moments, and then climbed down once more.

Time slipped by. At last Gina rose, mechanically brushing the dust from her clothes. All this while her place of refuge had been fitfully illuminated by even more distant lightning. Abruptly she realised that this was the tower from which, on that night years before, John Ireland's father had fallen to his death.

She looked from the windows. That way glittered the distant lights of Sydney. On the other side of the tower, the darkness still lay heavily. Beyond the black pines was the road along which she had been travelling before all this had happened. A torch flashed eerily among the trees, went out again. Then Craven was no longer in the house. This might be her chance. But when she tried to raise the trapdoor, it would not budge.

How long until daylight? In her haversack were matches. Gina struck one and was horrified to find how many hours stretched between them and dawn. She struck one match after another while she examined her prison. A broken chair comprised its only furniture, and the floor was thick with dust and debris. Yet, plainly discernible amid the dust was a confusion of footmarks, and by one window lay the end of a hand-rolled cigarette. The footmarks were not hers, and the cigarette was obviously a recent vintage. Someone had been in that tower not very long before. Craven? Possibly. But Craven had never rolled a cigarette in his life. Who, then?

Gina sat down, her back to the wall. Reaction had slowed her pulse and in that heavy air she felt drowsy. Try as she would to keep awake, she found herself nodding, starting in sudden alarm, dozing off again. Abruptly came the sound that brought her to her feet. Someone was climbing the circular staircase.

Nearer came the ring of feet on the iron rungs. They paused as though the climber rested and then came on again. They stopped at last and there was a peremptory thump on the trapdoor.

"Someone in there? Who is it? Come on, I can hear you."

Amid the shouts of a multitude Gina would have recognised the voice of J. F. Ireland . . .

"Quickly! Quickly!"

She dragged back the bolt with impatient fingers and tugged at the ring. For an instant the trapdoor resisted, and then flew back so that she staggered across the room. The manhole had become a yellow rectangle of light, through which a head and shoulders were thrust.

"Mr. Ireland!"

"Half a minute!" he reached below and set a small lantern on the floor. "Let's see who you are. Why, the butterfly girl!" He sprang through the manhole, and held the lantern high. "Yes, but how did you get in here, and who tied that trapdoor down, Miss Antony?"

His tone was suspicious, almost accusing. His face, thrown into relief by the light of the lantern, was sombre and

tense. Gina tumbled headlong into her story. Ireland checked her at the end of the first sentence.

"Take it easy. There's plenty of time."

"Mr. Harley Craven!" was all he said, and somehow he did not seem altogether surprised. "Well, we'd better get out of here before he comes back."

He picked up her haversack. The bottles clinked. "Something to drink?"

"Not unless you can drink chloroform."

"Can you?"

"It was for the butterflies," said Gina. "But we didn't get any."

"Keep it for next time," said Ireland.

As he went down he held the lantern so that she could see where to put her feet. He talked quietly while they climbed down.

"I used to run up and down here like a whirlwind when I was a youngster. The house partly belongs to me — for what that's worth. Not much, I'm afraid. Who would want a place like this nowadays? And anyhow, the land's dog-poor. I'm camping in the little cottage my father lived in towards the end of his life. It's about a quarter of a mile from here."

"Why did you come to the house?"

"I was standing in the door looking across at the tower, and thinking, when I saw a light."

"I was striking matches."

"As well you did," said Ireland. "I knew whoever it was had no business up here—but I didn't expect to find *you*."

He turned down the wick of the lantern until the merest glimmer showed. He stood listening in the half-light. The house was filled with mysterious creaks and rustlings. At last Ireland relaxed.

"Would you be afraid to wait here with the light while I investigate?"

"You're not going down in the dark alone."

"I know every inch of the house."

"Yes, but you're still not going unless I do."

"You're game, Gina."

"Not when I'm by myself."

"Who is? I wouldn't worry about that if I were you." He thought for a moment. "I don't particularly want to meet Craven while he's got a gun. We'll slip down to the next floor. There's a back staircase from there. I want you to get safely out of here —and myself, too."

On the floor below they waited listening, while Ireland led her down the passage to the left. Step as lightly as they would, the bare boards creaked beneath them. Passing the door, he held the dimmed lantern up.

"My room when I was a boy," he said quietly. "I used to creep out at night and slip down the back way. When my father found out there was trouble. The poor old chap was a bit hard to get on with sometimes."

"He died while you were away?"

"You heard about that."

"I read it in the press cuttings book at the office."

"Ah," said Ireland. "They'd have it there, of course. But here's something you didn't read—he came over here that night because he saw lights in the tower, just as I did, and wanted to know why."

GOING on again, they reached the stone-flagged entry below. He turned up the lantern. It cast a dull yellow glow on the dusty, cobwebbed walls, and picked out the face of the dead man who lay between them and the door. A wet track showed them where he had been dragged in, and water oozed from his sodden clothes to form little pools on the worn stones.

Gina felt ill. Ireland put an arm about her, and turned her round.

"Don't look, Gina. You've seen plenty to-night. Close your eyes and give me your hand until we're outside."

"He's dead?" she forced herself to say.

"You saw it happen . . . Poor Paulus!"

Obediently she closed her eyes and moved blindly as he led her forward. She heard him fumbling with keys.

Letting her hand go, Ireland abruptly pushed her behind him, to screen her from the man who had just emerged from the cellar, his torch dimming the puny yellow glow of the lantern.

"Don't move!" Craven's voice, husky and strained, was that of a man long past breaking point. "Put up your hands. Ireland!"

"Don't be a fool," said Ireland. "Do you think you can get away with this? You should know better, Craven. You've gone far enough, haven't you?"

"Too far! That's just it." The hand holding the revolver trembled.

"Let the girl go then. You and I can talk it over."

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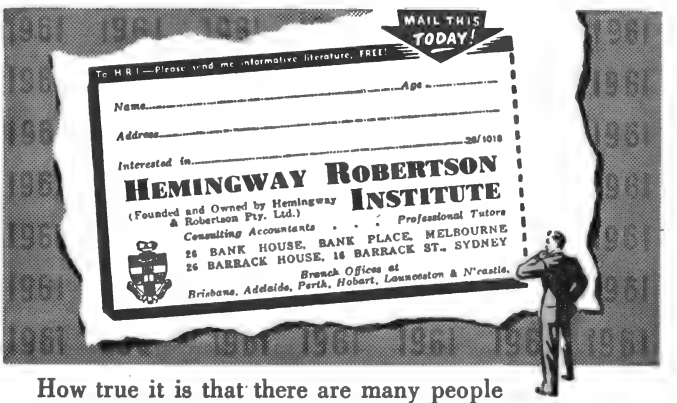

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"No. She's in it now. She's nothing to me."

"She is to *me*," said Ireland.

Something cold touched Gina's hand. A key. Her fingers closed about it. She did not need to be told what to do. Screened by Ireland and the black shadows he threw on the door, she half-turned and felt for the lock. Metal grated on metal. Had Craven heard it? He gave no sign. He was listening to another and more distant sound. Someone was knocking on the front door, the blows reverberating through the vast emptiness of the house.

"Listen to that!" said Ireland quietly.

"They'll go," declared Craven.

"They'll come again, whoever they are. To-morrow, the next day. Sooner or later. Why fool yourself, Craven?"

Gina had found the keyhole. She slipped the key in and nudged Ireland.

"Right!" he shouted, and as she turned the key he flung the lantern at Craven's head. Glass shattered as it struck him. Gina tugged at the door. It came back unwillingly on rusty, creaking hinges, and before it was half-open, Craven fired. Ireland cried out as he staggered against her.

Again Craven pressed the trigger, but the hammer fell on a spent cartridge. He hurled the heavy weapon at Ireland, missing him by inches, and then, dropping the torch, flung himself forward. The door slammed as they crashed into it. The torch rolled away, flinging a wheel of light across the wall. The two men threshed across the floor, stopping at the foot of the stairs, Craven uppermost. He had his hands at Ireland's throat, and was trying to batter his head against the stones.

The distant knocking had ceased. Gina heard Ireland telling her to go, but his voice was faint. She fell upon Craven like a fury, but he kicked her away.

SPARKS flew across the black screen in front of Ireland's eyes. He tried to rip away the fingers that clawed at his windpipe, but his left arm was almost useless and a red-hot skewer was slowly burning into the muscles in his chest. Yet Craven's grip was relaxing. The man sputtered and choked. The air reeked with a familiar sickly odour, bringing dim memories of white masks, great shaded lamps, steam rising from sterilisers. Craven's fingers slackened still more. Ireland called on the last of his reserves, puny though they were through years of privation, and drove his fist into his opponent's face. To his surprise, Craven flopped all over him like a broken puppet.

Thrusting him away, Ireland crawled to the wall and pulled himself up by its aid. The cloying taste of chloroform was in his nose.

"Gina! Where are you, Gina? You all right?"

He heard her say, "Strike a match!" and automatically felt in his pocket. A few tentative scratches and the flame took hold. Gina was kneeling on the floor beside Craven, who lay face downwards, his face muffled in her scarf.

"What have you done to him?"

"Open this door!" A woman's voice, angry and imperative. "I want to know what's going on. At once, or I'll bring the police . . ."

Then Gina: "Miss Meadows!"

The door opened. In the wavering rectangle of pale light stood a woman holding, of all things, a bicycle. She let it fall.

"Gina! Oh, my dear . . ."

THE room at the hospital was clean and airy. Through the french window opening on the balcony, Gina could see the broad back of a policeman.

Pale but cheerful, J. F. Ireland was propped up in bed. The draught from the electric fan ruffled his hair, his pipe was going, and a bedside radio played faintly.

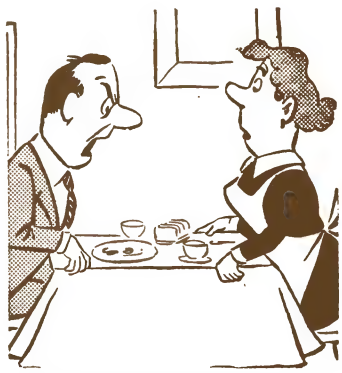
"I take my ease. Why not? Hospitals are old stuff to me." One arm was in a sling, but with the other he reached out to turn off the radio and sweep some newspapers off the chair. "Don't look so worried."

"I thought you might be very bad."

"Nothing in it The bullet went right through the muscles. Pretty soft stuff for the doctors—they didn't even have to fish for it. I'm a drop of blood short, it seems, but what of that? My worry was I didn't know how you were making out. They told me you were all right, but when they think a man's sick, they lie to him like blazes. You *are* all right, aren't you?"

"Yes." She felt fine, too, now. But last time she had seen him they were carrying him into the casualty ward, and the hours that had dragged by since then had not been the best. "Why the policeman?"

"Some legal formality. When there's murder all the boys like to be in on it, I suppose, in case they miss something." He looked searchingly at her. "You're tired. But you're still pretty. And nice. It isn't every girl that can be all three at once. Put that on record, Gina. What's the position at your office?"



"I'm not grumpy! I just can't think of anything nice to say."

"Someone's looking after things and Miss Meadows is looking after him."

"Miss Meadows is only a voice to me. Still, if she's on your side, she's all right. You knew the police got Craven? How did you quieten him?"

"It was the chloroform. I couldn't think what else to do, so I emptied the bottle on my scarf and twisted it round his face. It took a lot of kick out of him. Miss Meadows tied him up"—Gina blushed unexpectedly—"with his braces. She thought he wouldn't be able to run or fight that way."

"Initiative," said J. F. Ireland. "What did he say?"

"Nothing. He was too sick. Miss Meadows sent me off on

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the bicycle. She'd found mine on the road, that was why she went to the house looking for me. She told me to find some place with a telephone and ring up the police. She stayed to watch Craven and plug up the hole in your shoulder. The police came with an ambulance. That's about all."

"You don't think it's over yet, do you?" Ireland glanced at the constable outside. He had finished his tea and was rolling a cigarette. "There'll be an inquest — a trial — all sorts of bother."

"I know," said Gina. "It's started already. The detectives are very nice, but they didn't tell me much."

"What did you want to know?"

"Why . . . Well, why Craven shot Mr. Paulus, for one thing."

"Must you know now? It's a long story. You and I could find a lot more things to talk about, Gina. Let's think of the good times we're going to have when I get out of this. But perhaps you have other plans?"

"No plans," said Gina.

"This is the time to make them," said J. F. Ireland.

MR. CRAVEN was dictating. Never before had he been forced to dictate before an audience of men with iron faces and cold eyes. When he broke down and sobbed the listeners did not even look embarrassed. They were used to it.

"When I was in Japan in 1938, I met some influential people who suggested that in case of war, I might be useful to them. They explained how this might be done, and offered to pay me well. I was very short of money at the time. I agreed . . ."

Mr. Craven gave the reasons why he was short of money. It was a question of vanished trust funds. He regretted that, too. He also explained how he managed to keep in touch with his principals and how he received their instructions. It was all very interesting and involved. Now he came to the meat of the matter . . .

"On the evening of May 31, 1942, I went across from my week-end place at Benmore Bay to Mr. Ireland's house. I had keys, and had been there often before. I climbed to a tower, and made certain signals with a flash lamp. While doing this I was interrupted by Mr. Ireland. He said he had seen lights in the tower or thought he had, and had come over to investigate. He asked what I was doing and mentioned certain suspicions he had in his mind. After overpowering him I opened the window and pushed him out.

"As a result of my signals, Japanese submarines entered Sydney Harbour the following night. I had no idea that this would happen, and I received a great shock. I decided to do no more work of this kind. I am prepared to swear that I did not. Some time afterwards I realised that Mr. Joseph Paulus, my clerk, was suspicious. I began to fear that he considered me in some way responsible for the death of Mr. Ireland. I tried to find out what he knew, but he admitted nothing. He was not in a position to say anything, as he was under a heavy obligation to me. I knew him to be an embezzler and had given him employment out of charity.

"Mr. Paulus seemed very embittered when his son was killed, but I did not realise that he had written to Mr. Ireland, Junior, who was then in the army, hinting at what he thought. But I became alarmed when on Saturday afternoon last I saw Mr. Paulus walking across to the Ireland home with Mr. Ireland, Junior, who was staying at a cottage nearby. I watched them with field glasses and saw them in the tower. I came to the conclusion that Mr. Paulus had revealed something to Mr. Ireland. I waited on the road for Mr. Paulus that evening and asked him what he had told Ireland. I reminded him of the past. He told me that it was all ancient history, and that he had informed Mr. Ireland of his suspicions. We had an argument. He attacked me. I shot him. Then I saw a light coming over the hill. It was a girl on a bicycle . . ."

At last it all came to an end, and Mr. Craven signed his statement, though without a flourish.

Miss Meadows appeared at the door. She carried flowers. She was about to ask how the patient was, but at that moment the patient was doing so well that the question was superfluous. All she could do was cough.

"It's Miss Meadows," said Gina, not without confusion.

Miss Meadows said something about intruding.

"Not at all," said J. F. Ireland, pleasantly. "Haven't we a whole lifetime before us?"

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Without Let or Hindrance

(Continued from page 11)

for you because your uncle said you were a widow, but he didn't mention the children, and he didn't mention your—your entire lack of responsibility. The provisions of the lease don't provide for situations like this."

"But of course not," said the girl in her treacherously soft voice. "How could an old legal document have any feeling?"

"Pah!" Adam snorted, and turned and stalked out of the house.

It was all of a piece with the ridiculous farce that Aunt Hepzie, who never woke in the night, woke this night and called, "Adam, what are you doing? What a lot of noise you're making. Has something happened?"

"Nothing at all," Adam called from the passage. "Go to sleep."

"Adam, you speak as if I'm a child. That's if you would know how to tell a child to go to sleep."

"Oh, wouldn't I?" said Adam, going to her door. He couldn't resist adding with wry satisfaction, "I'd know how to change a baby, too, without sticking pins into it."

Aunt Hepzie sat up in bed. Her old bright eyes glinted with amusement.

"Adam, what *have* you been doing? You look like a harassed parent."

"Whatever I look like, it's earned me a place in a kid's prayers. And that's more than you can say, you and your mother bear and father bear and baby bear!"

"Glory be!" muttered Aunt Hepzie.

She was laughing at him, too. Or perhaps not at him, but with him. Secretly she would have liked her brilliant nephew to be a little more human, and this very juvenile conversation pleased her immensely. But how could one get pleasure out of anything that had to do with a flighty widow who seemed to have no heart and no conscience?

Adam went to bed with a book on Greek mythology, and paid particular attention to the legend of the Lorelei. With almost savage glee he read of the doomed sailors.

There was no sound of singing that night. Indeed, there was nothing to keep him awake, except that woman's yellow curls, and her laughing heartless eyes.

He arose in the vilest of moods. Mrs. Smythe was not back and the kitchen was cold and deserted. If he hadn't wanted tea so badly he would have paid Aunt Hepzie out by refusing to take her any, either. But one had to keep one's sense of proportion. A widow—gadding out every night and leaving her children to the mercy of any drunkard.

While the kettle was boiling he read his mail.

The first letter he opened was from old Blakiston.

My Dear Adam,

I cannot tell you how sorry I am about the mix-up that has occurred. It was my niece Barbara who tragically lost her husband a few months ago, who was to have moved into the cottage for a complete rest while the children went elsewhere. Instead, I find that she has persuaded her sister Nora to take the children while she has gone into the country, which she feels will do her more good at the present time. Believe me, I had no intention of inflicting on you, my dear boy, three noisy children and their rather irresponsible aunt whom, I understand, has a small part in a musical comedy at present running in the West End. I do sincerely apologise for any disturbance you have suffered, and trust that you will forgive me.

Sincerely yours,
Godfrey Blakiston.

P.S.—Nora is a very charming girl, but beware of her, for she always puts me in mind of that couplet of Homer's:

"Her feet are tender, for she sets her steps
Not on the ground but on the heads of men."

THE other letter was from Professor Birtton. It thanked Adam for the pleasant luncheon, complimented him on the progress of his work, and enquired after the small boys who had had such a lamentable plunge into the goldfish pond. *Sometimes, my dear boy, one feels you are a little too preoccupied with the old goddesses. It is our loss that there are none in existence to-day . . .*

The kettle boiled over. Aunt Hepzie's stick was tapping in the doorway. It was followed by the old woman, bright-eyed and curious.

"Adam, I couldn't trust you to make the tea. You seemed so upset last night. I'm afraid Mrs. Smythe is right about that widow being a disturbing influence."

. . . though sometimes I think each man finds his own, Adam read. That little brown spider of a man, he thought wonderingly. Then suddenly a most extraordinary, powerful and irresistible joy sent him striding across to Aunt Hepzie to swing her into his arms.

"Don't say 'that widow'!" he ordered. "Say Nora, say Beautiful, ——"

"Mercy to goodness!" came Mrs. Smythe's voice from the doorway. "What are you doing to your poor old aunt? Put her down at once, you naughty boy." Then she regained her respectful manner, and added, "By the way, there's a most disreputable character leaving next door, taxi come for her, and the twins are hollering fit to beat the band. You'd better close your windows if you want to get any work done."

A beatific look came over Adam's face. "Thank you, Mrs. Smythe," he said vaguely. "Thank you."

He went out at the door, called boisterously to Aristotle, and the two of them went leaping down the garden and over the privet hedge.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Smythe at last. "Didn't I say! The poor innocent has been a sitting target. Ever since she knocked him down!" ●

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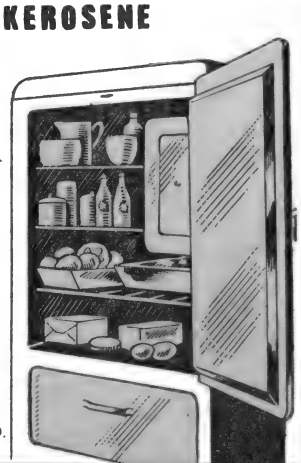

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Beloved Thief

(Continued from page 15)

ness by constant use. Her bird-bright eyes looked out of a face so brown and wrinkled that it was like an apple stored until it had rotted. That was the only sign, however, of her age, and her body, if shrunken, was tough and wiry.

Seeing Naomi coming, so light, so radiant, her eyes kindled, glowed. She had been troubled about the girl's unhappiness over the business of Isaac.

When Naomi had exchanged greetings with those about, she said, "Old One, I must talk to you."

How many times had the Old One heard these words? She rose willingly and nimbly, and the others continued to chatter. Most of them had had occasion to confide in the Old One at some time or another and it was a well-accepted convention that none should intrude or show curiosity.

The two went off through the barred and dappled light and shade of the date palms and coming presently to a trunk which had fallen, they rested on it.

"It is good," said the Old One, speaking clearly and crisply with none of the quaverings which might have been expected, "to see Naomi happy again. So you have come to accept Isaac, child?" But the tone in which she asked revealed that she knew this was not the explanation.

"Isaac!" scoffed Naomi. "I wouldn't marry him if another deluge came and he sailed the only ark up to me when I was drowning." Her laugh was gay.

"Who is it, then?"

Now it gave Naomi great joy to let the whole story bubble out, for it had been bottled up within her like strong and intoxicating wine. She told of her three enchanted nights in words that sang like the birds of dawning, and sometimes her deep eyes were lit with fire and sometimes they were lost and full of dreams, and sometimes they held all the merriment of youth.

"I have heard all the things a girl longs to hear from the lips of the only man I wish to hear them from. No poet has ever found sweeter words more full of magic. I am everything he did not think existed in this world which has served him ill."

"They are plausible, these scallywags, as needs they must be," said the Old One, but her tone and smile prevented the remark quenching the girl's delight, which was so obviously authentic.

"I have been kissed by the only lips that will ever kiss mine. I have been embraced by arms as strong as iron yet as gentle as the touch of a dove's wing. No other arms shall ever hold me. I have burned as with fire, and I have been cooled as if by a breeze from the snow on the mountains when the summer is on the plains."

"I see," said the Old One, "that your Barabbas has made you into a poet, too. It would seem you are in love."

"No two have ever been so much in love before!"

The Old One didn't say how often she had heard that boast.

"So he comes, Naomi, this thief in the night, and steals the hand of the rich man's daughter?"

"Nay, he says I am even as he, since I came equally as a thief in the night and stole away that which he did not know he had—his heart. Besides, he sees things clearly. He knows very well that my parents will forbid me their door and never mention my name again and cut me off without a penny for doing this."

"There is that, and it is well you've faced it. You wed him, eh?"

"You would not have me be his concubine? Nor would he have it so, though if it were his will I have not any will left of my own. But he knows a priest who is in his debt for some service and will marry us at to-morrow's dawn, over in Jerusalem."

"It all runs fast—perhaps too fast," said the Old One, "yet so does a mountain brook when the rains of spring bring it to the flood. No one may stay the brook then. And who can stay this love of yours? Not I, nor would I, if perchance I could. It seems to be the real thing which strikes but seldom in this humdrum world. Yet it remains: you wed a thief."

"He is more than that," she protested. "He has a great gift for words, and for a time he went into politics. But he was young then, and fell in with the wrong side, which brought him into much disfavour with the authorities and the rulers. Now he is wiser, older. He will become a figure, a leader. Love and marriage will do that for him. I shall change my Barabbas."

At this saying the Old One sat silent, eyes sad with wisdom.

Presently she said, "Child, child, that is the great illusion of all women in love, and it is odd that the rascals are always the most lovable and the most loved. Yet marriage changes no man. It never has, it never will. Think here in our little community. Was not Esther so much in love with her Greek gambler that she was convinced she could

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woo him from his pursuit of fickle Chance? I tell no secrets. You know yourself that to-day they have lost all and starve. Did not Sybil marry him whom all men called "The Cruel" knowing she could tame and gentle him. Look at her bruises and scars. Did not Miriam love the drunken Saul so deeply that she was sure she could win him from the grape? For those first few months—yes. But what of him now? Who won? Miriam or the wine?"

"It is different as between Barabbas and me," Naomi asserted with confidence.

"So said they all."

Suddenly she bent down and cupping her hands, the Old One scooped up dust. Naomi watched agog. It was well known that the Old One could see through the screen of Time, but she seldom could be persuaded to do so, declaring that life being what it was, far better to let the future keep its secrets. Now she closed her eyes, and moving her hands this way and that over a flat stone before her, allowed the sand to trickle down, weaving an intricate pattern.

The Old One spoke unintelligible words as the grains drifted.

At last she opened her eyes, read what the sand had written, and without looking at Naomi said, "Child, you will never change your Barabbas from being a thief."

"I don't believe it!"

"I do not ask you to, and yet it is so," the Old One said, still speaking from remoteness, out of the years unborn. She bent lower, continuing to read the sand, and her wrinkles deepened in bewilderment, and her eyes were empty, as if her gaze were lost in time. "It is strange. I do not understand. Barabbas will be saved by love — yet not by your strength or love."

"Another woman's?" asked Naomi sharply, between wrath and terror.

"It is not that," said the Old One. "I—I do not understand. It is a mystery." She came back out of the years ahead into her own body. "I can tell you no more, child. The later sands are too dazzlingly bright. They blind me. But the end is happiness. Marry your Barabbas, Naomi. There is a great wonder in it, but I know not what."

THEY dwelt in a humble white house outside the walls of Jerusalem, and love dwelt there with them, and yet neither peace nor secure happiness. It was ever as if their home were built, not on solid foundations of rock, but upon shifting quicksands. Any hour might bring the walls toppling down, shattering the bliss which otherwise was theirs.

For the Old One had spoken truth, the sand had not lied.

Barabbas had a black record; he was notorious. Honest men—and those who had not been caught — drew aside their garments lest they should touch his and be contaminated. None would trust the thief of thieves, the high priest of crime. And when it came to politics, though he had the eloquence and brains and a fine appearance and bearing, he was also known far and wide as a firebrand, a malcontent and troublemaker. Even those who plotted against the established order wanted no truck with him, since they had to be more discreet and wary than any others.

Thus it went with them, and their days and nights were marred, for she was sad for her Barabbas and he was sad feeling that in having to remain a criminal he failed her. Yet, out of love and consideration, neither spoke of these cankerworms which gnawed at the very roots of their lives. Barabbas continued to go out into the darkness and return before the sun rose; he disappeared on unexplained errands for days at a time. He was more active than ever; more reckless. He made rich hauls, but there was so much wastage in his gains — the receivers drove such hard bargains — that though they did not starve they were never rich.

Against the day of disaster which might be any day, Barabbas had contrived to save some money which was hidden beneath a false floor in the dove-cote in the patch of garden.

"They would never find it there if they searched the house ten times, dearest," he said. "It is for you if the time comes when . . ."

He did not finish, having no need.

Naomi put her arms about him and held him close.

"Don't say such things, darling," she begged. "That time will never come."

Barabbas held her but made no answer. He knew that for such as they happiness, and life itself, hung on a fragile thread.

A MORNING came when Naomi was doing her shopping—she had no servants now—and she heard the other women talking of the great wedding which was to happen that day. Isaac, son of the merchant, was to marry the lovely daughter of a wealthy maker of swords in famed Damascus. It was to be the wedding of the year and guests were arriving from afar.

Naomi did not envy the bride from Damascus. She would need a fine wedding to blind her eyes to the groom. Gathering up her purchases, Naomi wondered idly what her parents—who, as had been foreseen, had put her out of their lives — would do with all the wealth for which they had skimped and scraped. Perhaps it would go to the Temple to buy them places in Paradise.

Barabbas had just come in when she got home, and she ran and embraced him with more than usual warmth.

"So you have heard the news," he said, smiling down on her shining dark head. "I am mightily relieved. I have always feared that Isaac would come striding back into our lives and carry you off."

She laughed up at him. So they went on through the days, dancing, but on a tight-rope from which they might fall at any moment.

The quiet knocks at the door continued; the furtive visitors came under cover of dark. And somehow now when this happened the courage would go out of Barabbas and he would hesitate to answer, looking at the blank wood in sudden fear. Then Naomi would be grieved again, for she would know that this was because of her, and that before she came he would have swaggered out to meet whatever might be, even though Caesar himself should stand outside.

Naomi was alone on the night when another of those raps sounded through the quiet of the room. It was repeated quickly, on a note of urgency, like the throb of a drum. Where she herself was concerned, Naomi had no fear and, going to the door, flung it open.

Timothy staggered in, out of breath, sweating, closing the door quickly behind him. Now this Timothy was he who had gagged her and taken her to meet her love, and held a dagger against her skin whilst she did so. For those good services he had become a friend.

"What is it, Timothy?" she asked.

"They're after me," he gasped, "and I must not stay. But I had to tell you. They have taken him up and flung him into the dungeons."

Naomi stared — though it was news not unexpected — and her hands clasped her breasts, seeking to calm her pounding heart.

"What will they do to him?"

Timothy dared not answer that. Instead he said, "Take a friend's advice and go back to your home and make peace with your parents, — go in sackcloth and ashes, but go!" She shook her head without saying anything. He drew out a handful of small coins. "You will need money," he said. "Take this. It is all I have."

She found speech at last.

"Thank you, dear Timothy, but you need it more than I. He foresaw this hour. Could I see him?"

"Not a chance if you crawled on your knees! I must away." The panic of the hunted was in his eyes again. "They might seek me here. Keep heart! It may yet be well. Good-bye."

And he was gone into the perilous hiding of the night.

Naomi stood staring unseeing at the door. She knew that the law was merciless as an eagle when its claws closed on such as Barabbas, her husband. Seldom was there any other escape save that of death. She wondered, achingly, whether it was good or ill Barabbas did not know that she was to have a child.

And she thought of the Old One. Her sand had not written this as the sorry ending.

BARABBAS sat on the damp flagstones of his tomblike cell and thought of Naomi whilst the water dripped down the walls and the rats scuttled. The only light was a pale beam which struck down from a tiny hole near the ceiling.

A shock when the heavy door creaked open, for this was not anything like the hour for his single daily meal. The turnkey stood in the opening, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, his pock-marked face as gloomy as ever, his single eye glowering as if he performed an unwelcome duty.

"What now?" asked the prisoner, scrambling up.

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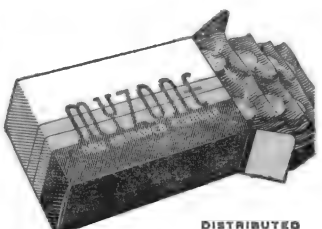

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The gaoler merely jerked his thumb again. He had been tortured once and had no tongue. The mischance had made him eminently suited to his present task.

Barabbas shambled out, unsure and unsteady as a prisoner is apt to be. In the long corridor a Roman officer waited, holding a scroll in his hand. He looked very superior and trim and haughty in his fine uniform.

"You are free—go!" he said curtly, as if he, too, disliked this duty.

"But—?" gasped Barabbas, stunned, unable to believe his ears.

"Here is your pardon," said the officer, holding the scroll at arm's length to put as much distance as possible between the Jew's lice and filth. "Count yourself the luckiest man alive. Now go! Go! Before I speed you on your way." His hand fell on the hilt of his sword.

"But?" repeated Barabbas, still astounded.

"You were to be handed over to them, but in freeing you the arrangement is fulfilled. His Excellency has had enough of Jews for one day. He fears that the sight of you might lead to further turmoil and rioting. You are to get out. He has been too patient."

And Barabbas passed down the long corridor like one who walks in sleep. At the end, the great outer gate was opened and he blundered into the sunshine and the crowded street under the wide, free sky. He still could not grasp his amazing escape from what had seemed certain death. At any moment he expected heavy hands to fall on his shoulders and drag him back whilst, with gruff laughter, the captors explained that it had all been just a little joke, and they wanted him again.

Yet he held in his hand the pardon signed by Pontius Pilate himself.

He came to a gate in the city wall, and decided he would skirt around Jerusalem, escaping the further bewilderment of its crowded ways. Was it really true that he was going home to Naomi?

He could not hurry, for muscles and mind were still cramped by his weeks in the stone box, and he scarcely knew where his unsteady steps were taking him until suddenly he found himself on the outskirts of a crowd spreading up a hill which he recognised as Golgotha, the place of the skull. On the crest, as was often the way, were three crosses where condemned men died for their crimes. He paused, checked by the realisation that he might well have been one of them.

A legionary sat by the bank of a little stream. He had taken off his helmet, which lay on the grass beside him, and he was eating grapes, his unheeding back turned on Golgotha.

"Excuse me, sir," said Barabbas, pausing with the humility of one who has tasted life in the dungeons, "but why are so many here? It is not usual. Who is executed to-day?"

"Now, you speak civilly and are a fine figure for one of your tribe though it seems you have had bad times of late. I'll tell you the little I know. Two of them are just ordinary thieves, but the middle one called himself King of the Jews."

Barabbas looked puzzled.

"But King Herod is our king," he said.

"I care not," said the soldier, spitting a pip into the stream. "Caesar is your ruler, but if you wanted a king of your own I should say he who hangs up there has the makings of a thousand of your Herods. Still, I care not. This is a mad country and I am only marking time against the day when my tour of duty is done and I return to civilisation and sanity."

"Who, then, is this other king?"

The soldier shrugged and spat another pip.

"A preacher," he said. "Some called him the Nazarene, some the Galilean, some even say he is the Christ, the son of your God. I care not. I worship the true gods—not these little provincial upstarts. It was a queer business, all the same, and could only have happened in this benighted land. It seems one of your stupid holidays — signifying nothing—has come round, and the custom is that there should be released one of the malefactors who are in the cells. We, who rule the world, may smile at such childish customs, but we humour our subject peoples by observing them. Now our governor, Pilate, is a very clever gentleman. He saw no harm in this simple, quiet man who had stirred up no trouble against the rule of Caesar, and he tried to fob the Jews off by offering them a thief and vagabond who is the most

hated wrong-doer in the land. Though this robber had plundered their flocks and their warehouses and their homes —and is suspected of murder —they would not have him punished, but claimed the Nazarene and would not be put off. So the Governor called for water and washed his hands of the whole tiresome business. I should have done exactly the same."

"This — this thief? What was his name?"

"I have already forgotten. It was of no account."

"Barabbas?"

The soldier slapped his bare knee, relieved to have the right answer though it was of no import.

"That was it," he said.

"I am he."

The Roman looked at him with sudden but passing interest.

"Are you indeed?" he said. "You don't look so very bad. Barabbas, eh? Well, you ought to be grateful to the other Jews, and perhaps most of all to the preacher up there, for I had the feeling all the time that he was the greatest person in the judgment hall and could have saved his life had he willed it so, which would have suited our lot very well."

Before he had finished, Barabbas had started up the hill. The Roman put some more grapes in his mouth and didn't bother to turn about to look after the Jew, though he admitted he was a lucky man —the luckiest alive.

Barabbas thrust his way up and up the slope through the staring, silent throng, and it was something in his face rather than his mere strength which caused them to make way for him. So presently he came to the summit and stood immediately behind the circle of soldiers.

From there he saw that one of the thieves was Timothy of his own band. Greatly daring in that moment he would have called some word of parting, some attempt at comfort.

But his eyes turned then to the cross on which he should have been dying and he forgot all else in the sight of the Man who hung there crowned with thorns and bleeding. He seemed to be surrounded by a great, shining, heart-warming light; all love and pity and forgiveness for mankind was written in His face even though it was contorted by mortal agony.

Barabbas was a thief and utterly irreligious and a thorn in the side of righteousness and the law, yet standing there he spoke his thoughts aloud; "There is the Messiah, the true son of God who was sent and we knew him not. He dies out of pure love for me and all us other miserable sinners, and yet He lives forever."

Had he said such things on the pavement outside the Judgment Hall it might have gone ill for him, but a deep awe and hush had come upon the throng, and those about who heard him looked at the big man with wide and troubled eyes and many nodded sad and solemn agreement.

Then Barabbas was silent, listening only to the few words that were spoken out of the great light, hearing Timothy recognise the Divine as he had himself and repent and be forgiven with the promise of a place in Paradise.

Barabbas, who had not wept since he was abandoned in the Temple as a babe, stood with great tears running down his cheeks.

When it was over he turned and began to hasten home to Naomi with the news of the miracle which had been done for him. The earth trembled and the sky darkened and many ran in panic. Not so Barabbas. The signs to him were only natural. As if he carried within some glowing light which had been given to him he went through the troubled people like a bright clear, steady torch, and even amidst their alarms many glanced at him in wonder, seeing him as one who had been strangely blessed in that dark hour.

IT was near dawn, for, with so much to be told, they had gone to bed very late. But all was arranged now. To-morrow they would set off for a far country where Barabbas would start life anew, taking any honest task he could get, earning even the merest pittance, but by the sweat of his brow.

He slept now, exhausted by marvels, but Naomi was still awake, the child stirring in her.

The new day stole in.

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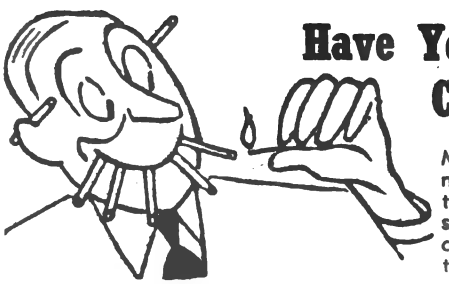

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Wings from the North

(Continued from page 16)

ing countryside quite unlike their native tundras. A man came into sight in one place. Both Harfang and Nyctea knew what he was at once, because men had robbed their nest and made loud blasts of noise, two years before.

The next thing both owls saw, as they descended toward a group of farm buildings, was a bird that resembled a ptarmigan. That it might belong to mankind was beyond their knowledge. Here was food, and they swooped upon it.

THE farmer stepped outside just as a pair of fiery-eyed phantoms dropped out of a snow flurry after one of his hens that was fleeing for shelter in the waning day. The sight froze him, open-mouthed.

Harfang seized the prey, but his tired wings did not have the strength to lift it off the ground. For a long second, he beat in frost-winged silence until Nyctea, sensing danger, came to his aid. Together they whisked the squawking chicken into the air, while the man shouted and ran back into his barn.

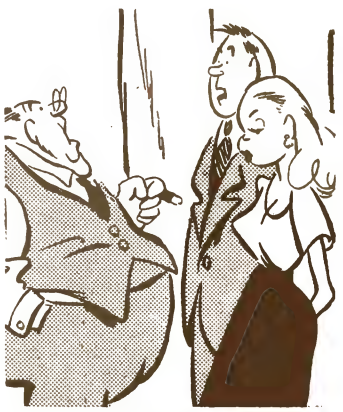
Moments later, blasts of that noise the owls associated with nest robbery smote their ears, but Harfang and Nyctea were safely under way, screened by snowfall and murky light. They flew with their burden until exhaustion forced them to land. And then they ate. Never did renewed life circulate through their bodies with more welcome warmth. But had Nyctea not helped, Harfang's wings would have joined the farmer's trophies in the barn.

And now, although these visitors from the arctic silence did not know it, they were entering the domain of a new enemy — human beings and their noise. Famine, the foe that had driven them out of Keewatin, was left behind. But in its place, increasing as they flew southward, was the noise-enemy that never seemed to rest.

Food, from the owls' standpoint, was abundant in this new land. During the night, they caught a domestic cat that had gone wild, and discovered a barn that contained rats and mice. At dawn, they came to rest in a maple glen, quite refreshed. Before long, a Canadian Pacific passenger train roared out of the storm, belching smoke and noise. Harfang and Nyctea took to their wings in a hurry, and soared into a north wind that whisked them on their way faster than at any time before.

BY now, the Great Storm was sweeping from Saskatchewan into the United States, and the pair of snow owls rode the vanguard of it, veering south-west like flotsam tossed ahead of an onrushing tide. In two days, they had crossed the continental divide through Montana and Idaho, and were into eastern Oregon, still battling the elements in one of the most extensive blizzards of a generation.

Their faculties were quickly adaptable, however, and they learned that food was more abundant around the habitations of human beings. They also learned that men were less apt to be about in the comparative quiet of night and, if they were, they seemed strangely blind. So Harfang and Nyctea hunted only by night, and survived, while others of their species succumbed to guns during the day. Their relatives, the native owls, knew the rules from generations of experience.



"Sir, I'm an industrious young man of good character, and have a little money saved, so—well, I'd like to cancel my engagement to your daughter."

But most of the arctic migrants knew mankind only from rare glimpses, and were as naive in this more populous and noisy land as Eskimos in New York City.

Still the Great Storm continued, howling across the North-west, while Harfang and Nyctea retreated ever farther south until they came to the Klamath River mouth, on the Northern California coast. Had they lingered another twenty-four hours in Keewatin, they never could have fought their way out alive. Now, however, instinct called a halt in this land at weather's edge. They had gone far enough.

To these newcomers from the icelands, the Redwood Empire shore seemed a land of new-found spring. Its warmth troubled them at first, although mankind went about bundled up and complaining of an unusual winter, while a light snow spread from the mountains almost to the coast. Food was so plentiful that they no longer needed to hunt in barns, and there were days when Harfang and Nyctea ate as much as half their own weight in waterfowl alone. This, together with a respite from the Great Storm, soon put them in prime condition. But the baneful element was noise. It was in the air everywhere, and beat upon the owls' acute hearing.

Trucks and automobiles that fled faster than snowshoe rabbits, rent the air day and night, while noisy human beings sawed and crashed amid the timber. This was an alien world from the quiet of Keewatin, and already a home-desire was upon the arctic owls. With the first harbinger of winter's end, they would start their northward flight, away from the teeming clamour.

One evening, when Harfang was flying over a tributary creek, he saw a large fish with its dorsal fin out of water, working its way up a shallow riffle. He dove upon it at once, sinking his fur-clad talons deep into its back.

But the fish was a fifteen-pound steelhead trout—nearly three times Harfang's weight —and strong with the urge of its spawning run. It bucked and thrashed like a bull trying to throw a rider, while Harfang hung on, beating his wings in futility . . . whereupon the big trout turned and raced downstream into a snag hole. In an instant, Harfang was under water, with his wings twisting behind him as he strangled and strove to let go.

Down into deep water they surged, and under a log jam, where Harfang's wings caught in the debris. Water seemed to crush into his lungs, and he knew fear as never in his life, while his legs were all but pulled out of joint in an agony of stretching. Then his talons straightened, and the steelhead tore free. A reaction that was half instinctive, half convulsive, pushed him out of the death-trap, and he fought to the surface, where Nyctea was hovering anxiously. She helped him flop ashore, where he lay stunned and nearly drowned.

AFTER that, the pair of snow owls fished together. They would perch motionless on rocks beside riffles until a

trout of acceptable size came by. If that was too much steelhead for one partner, the other came to the rescue, as in the case of their first chicken. Even so, they took an occasional ducking — but they got fish.

Nearly a month passed and, as the January moon went into its wane, the dusky horned owls of the redwoods turned their attention to nesting. A pair of these ferocious birds felt themselves sole owners of a redwood glen that Harfang and Nyctea had chosen for a daytime hideout, and looked upon the snow owls as invaders in need of killing. Although these natives were somewhat smaller than their arctic relatives, they were fighters that could whip eagles, and feared nothing except mankind's guns.

Late one afternoon, the horned owls began hooting deep in a sombre copse. By sundown, they had worked themselves into a fury.

Darkness was rising velvet from the forest floor—when Harfang and Nyctea suddenly found themselves fighting for their lives. Nor were their long wings any help, since their shorter-winged attackers could dodge in and about the branches with ease. Twice, Harfang had clutches of feathers torn out, and once he was almost borne to the ground when his foe got a chance hold. Even Nyctea, who had taken on the female horned owl, was being driven from his side.

The snow owl is no coward when battle is indicated. Had the situation been reversed, Harfang and Nyctea would have fought to the death. As it was, they knew they did not belong here, and so wanted only to escape these dark-winged terrors that cracked their beaks like mad things, and lusted to kill.

Upward, and clear of the big trees, the battle raged, with the snow owls dodging like hawks being mobbed by crows. Ermine-down feathers swirled like snowflakes as they took to the open air, where their superior speed saved them. After a half-mile chase, the horned owls put back, triumphant.

NEXT morning, Harfang and Nyctea sought shelter in another grove, near which was camped a trailer colony. As day came on, jalopy automobiles rattled back and forth, children shrilled, dogs yapped, men yelled, radios squawked, and the two snow owls, high in a redwood tree, were kept awake by the din. By mid-morning they decided to leave. They did not fly high, as when the horned owls were after them, but dropped low and headed for a ravine.

Two men were skulking in the brush, on hunt for anything that might fill their stewpots at camp. When they saw the great white-winged birds approaching, they stood for a moment transfixed. Then one of them jerked a shotgun to his shoulder.

The motion caught Harfang's eye too late. Deafening blasts struck his ears, and he was knocked off course by a blow. Nyctea cried out and fell—nor was there anything Harfang could do. He fled with every ounce of his wounded strength.

The men were disappointed. They looked at Nyctea's human-appearing head, with her mysterious eyes already filming over, and swore. "Hell, it's jes a ol' hoot-owl," one of them said. "Cain't nobody eat that."

"Kyaw," said the other. "I thought maybe they was swans." He kicked the quivering victim, and rapier-sharp talons pierced his shoe. The man yelped, and jerked free.

"Why, damn you!" he cried. He pointed his gun and blasted a gaping hole through Nyctea's body, scattering blood-drenched snowy down among the ferns. "Ah'm hurt," he whined.

Harfang's plumage had deflected much of the scattered shot that raked him and, while he was shocked and bleeding, he was not fatally wounded. He continued up the ravine, and alighted in a fir thicket atop a ridge. The intuition of wild things told him Nyctea was dead, but he was too shaken to be aware clearly.

It was after dark before Harfang dared return to the murder scene. And there he saw. How he might have felt as he stood vigil over what was left of his life-partner, is denied superior beings to know. He was lonely, bewildered, and in pain.

Late that night, Harfang left the locality, never to return. Wounded muscles had stiffened, and so he did not fly far, but hid in the hills, away from sight and sound of mankind, the noise-enemy.

For several days, Harfang ventured only far enough from his refuge to catch food. Then, with returning vitality, came a half-felt restlessness. The time had not come for him to go north, nor would there be another mate for him when he returned to Keewatin, for snow owls mate only once. But now he wanted increasingly to be on the move, and

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needed only a stimulus to start him off.

This came abruptly one sundown when an aeroplane, looking for a lost man, roared so low over Harfang's hide-out that it all but brushed the treetops. He fled, dreading the noise-enemy as never before. But once under way, he felt lost and alone, since the call to return had not come. Ice-winged tempests still rode the skies of Keewatin, and famine gripped the tundras. And so he drifted into Wyoming, where he ran into a mid-February blizzard that shattered all records, and paralysed railroads.

Harfang paid little heed to the weather, but hunting was bad. On the second night of the storm, he found a large barn with its lower door open, and flew in at once in search of prey. He did not reconnoitre first, as would a native owl, more wary of the ways of mankind. He knew what he wanted, and circled over a hay loft where squeaking and rustling told him of mice.

He had scarcely begun to hunt, when a tractor approached the door, vibrant with light and noise. Harfang flew to the rafters, but even the usual pigeon holes were closed. The doorway below seemed his only escape, and now that was blocked by a couple of men and the machine. He retreated to the highest corner and hid.

The men clattered and talked for a time. Then the lights went out, and the barn door rumbled shut with a clang. All was quiet once more, but Harfang wanted no more of men and their noise. He hovered overhead, watching the tractor now so silent —and saw the entrance had disappeared! He took alarm at once, and began to race back and forth the length of his prison, seeking any way to escape into the protecting blizzard.

But the barn was well constructed and weather-tight. Not even a swallow could get out. Harfang was trapped. And search though he might, there was no release. When the first light of dawn filtered through a row of small windows, he hurled himself against these, but found them as resistant as the ice they resembled.

The door below began to rattle. Harfang flew high into a roof corner to watch. The door opened slightly, and stopped. The owl's heart was drumming. To fear of confinement was added fear of the unknown. Abandoning all caution, he dived downward at that opening — just as a man started in!

The surprise was mutual. Harfang banked sharply, and one white-down wing slapped the man's face. The man yelled, dodged out, and slammed the door shut.

Up in his corner again, Harfang heard a babble of talk outside—and then the entire barn lighted up, bright as day. Startled, he took to his wings as the entrance opened, and several faces peered up.

To the men below, Harfang's snow-winged flight looked unearthly. "Good lord, no wonder he scared you!" said one of them. "It's a big snowy owl. Hey—don't shoot him! You'll blast a hole through the roof. How the devil did he get in, I wonder?"

"Let's build a good-sized cage and keep him," suggested another. "And for God's sake, keep this door closed."

All that morning, Harfang circled the upper reaches of the big barn, while one man hammered intermittently, and others came in to stare at the splendid captive and contribute their share of sound. The noise was intolerable, and several times he banged against the windows with such force that the men fastened hog wire across them for protection.

Toward midday, two men strung a fish net between long poles, and began chasing Harfang back and forth. He almost got caught in this snare at first, and thereafter by-passed it in the roof heights. But he was wearing down from tension and fright, and it was only a matter of time until he would be taken.

"Hey, you fellows, let's go eat," announced the ranch owner. "After lunch we'll rig a couple more nets on to a frame, get those high ladders from outside, and gang up on him."

They filed out the door, glancing over their shoulders, and for the moment Harfang was alone. He retreated panting to his roof corner. The barn's warmth was adding to his misery, although no human would have considered it remotely mild.

THE storm had lessened during midday, and now a pair of small boys, who already had eaten, wanted to look at the snowy owl again. They had been inside the barn part of the morning, but the thrill of adventuring alone—especially when their elders forbade—was too tempting. What they did not know was that their father had shut off the barn lights during lunch time to save diesel fuel.

They tugged at the heavy roller door, secure in the knowledge they could not be seen from the house, but it stuck. They heaved against it with all their strength—and it rolled half-way open.

But no reassuring light greeted the youngsters. They fell back from the opening in alarm. It was one thing to watch a ghost-headed will o' the wisp in the light, and quite another matter when its whereabouts in dusk-dimness were unknown.

For an instant, Harfang poised in his corner. Something was prompting him that this was not to be feared like the noisy crowd—that instead, he was the thing feared—and here was his chance. Like a ski-rider plunging down a slope, he flung himself from the roof peak and shot out through the doorway. A dozen wingbeats rocketed him upward and off, leaving the shrill wails of the boys in his wake.

Thereafter he avoided barns as a stag would sheer away from the hunters' lodge. He wanted only one thing now—to leave this land of the noise-enemy and return to Keewatin.

Harfang was nearing Canada when the first harbinger of change-to-come reached him The storms were not done, but the death-hold of winter was breaking. Already, a few small birds were about. It was time to go.

Away into the frost mists, straight toward Keewatin, winged Harfang—first of the snow owls to return. Ahead was loneliness, while others went about their mating. But the noise-enemy would no longer menace him in the arctic silence he trusted and understood. ●

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Father and I Were Ranchers

(Continued from page 19)

my idea that we ought to sit down and try to work out our differences with the men we've been fighting."

The men didn't seem to like that at all, and started shouting and talking all at once again. Some of them even swore—with Mother right in the other room. Mr. Corcoran called the men up near the head of the ditch some awful names, and said you might as well argue with a jackass as any one of them. At last Mr. Wright had to pound on the table and shout, "For God's sake, shut up and give Charlie a chance to tell us what his idea is, anyway."

Father didn't start to talk again till everybody was quiet, then he said, "Those fellows up there are holding the trump cards and they know it. I'm not too sure I wouldn't take pretty near my full measure of water if I were in their places and saw my crops drying up. I don't think they want a court fight, or a fist fight, or a gun fight any more than we do, but I don't think they're going to give up the hand without winning the odd trick. I wouldn't do it, and I don't think any of you fellows would. I'm inclined to think we'd be better off to have the assurance of a reasonable part of our share in dry time, than to take the chance of not geting any and losing all our late crops."

Father stopped talking as if he expected them to say he was wrong, but nobody spoke till Mr. Wright said, "Go on."

Then Father said, "I believe that if we approach them right with an agreement that we'd settle for eighty per cent of our proportion, based on ditch-head level, we might come to terms with them."

Jerry Alder and two or three of the younger fellows thought it would be better to keep on fighting the water down the ditch at night, but Mr. Wright, and Fred, and Carl, and even Mr. Corcoran, thought Father's idea was best. It was right then that Mother pushed up the window in the front room and Grace and I got scared, so we had to crawl back to the bunkhouse. In about half an hour all the men came out and started hitching up their horses. Mr. Wright was the last one to drive away, and before he went he called to Father, "You'll be at my house, then, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

Father called back, "I'll be there," and went into the house and closed the door.

There weren't any more fights over water that year, and when Willie Aldivote came up to the pasture to visit me a few days later, he seemed to think Father was quite a hero. I was proud because he said Father could fight like hell for a sick man, and that everybody thought he did a smart job getting the men up the ditch to agree about the water.

I GIVE MR. LAKE A RIDE

ABOUT the only fun I had the rest of that summer was the two times Fred Aultland put up his hay. Father and I worked for him two weeks both times, and each time we got a cheque for fifty dollars. The more I herded Mrs. Corcoran's cows, the more I didn't like it. As the pasture dried up, the cows made more trouble about trying to get into the alfalfa fields, and as they got skinnier and skinnier Mrs. Corcoran kept blaming me and saying it was because I brought them in too early, or because I didn't graze them where the grass was best. Fred Aultland said it was because I didn't let them get into the neighbours' crops enough to suit her.

Just before school opened she gave me fits because I brought them back to the corral one night at five minutes before six. When she pinned the thirty-five cents into my shirt pocket, she told me that I hadn't earned half of it, and she was only giving it to me because we were so poor. We weren't poor, and I told her so, and yanked the pin out and threw the money right down by her feet. After that she wasn't so mean, and picked it up and passed it to me after I got on Fanny.

I was mad all the way home. When I got there Mother was feeding the hens and turkeys out beside the barn. After I'd pulled the bridle off Fanny so she could go and roll, Mother asked me what the matter was. I remembered what Father had told me about forgetting what Mrs. Corcoran said and not telling anybody, so I told Mother I was mad because I didn't think I was getting paid enough for herding the cows. She put her arm around me and pulled me up against her. Then she patted me on the head, and said, "Son, if you amount to as much as I think you're going to, some day you'll kick on a dollar and thirty-five cents a day." I did tell Father about it that night when we were milking, though. And from then on I never herded Mrs. Corcoran's cows.

School started again about the first of October. Muriel was old enough to go that year, but she wasn't strong enough to walk the mile and a half, so Father let us drive Fanny. It wasn't a bit the way starting school had been when we first came there. All the kids knew we had a horse now, and that I had ridden up to the mountains to get Two Dog, and that I had made Mrs. Corcoran pay me thirty-five cents a day for herding her cows. They knew, too, about Father fighting to get the irrigating water and about his fixing Fred Aultland's stacker

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so as to make the hay fall where they wanted it. Everybody called me Spikes, and Freddie Sprague gave me half an apple at morning recess.

Mr. Lake was the chairman of the school board. They said he always came for the opening day, and he always rode his old white mule. He was a little man—quite a lot older than Father—and he had big joints at the knuckles of his hands. All morning he sat up on the little platform by Miss Wheeler's desk and watched everything we did. While he was watching us, he kept pulling his fingers, one at a time, until he made the knuckle pop. Just when you didn't expect it he would point at somebody and ask him to bound California, or what body of water the Mississippi River emptied into, or something else. He got me on the worst one. He pointed his finger right at me and said, "You! Little tow-headed fella! Go to the board and write me: 'Pare a pear with a pair of scissors'."

The only two kinds I knew about were *pear* and *pair*, and I got all mixed up on whether there were two *s*'s or two *z*'s in *scissors*. He banged his hand down on the desk and told Miss Wheeler she wasn't a very good teacher, or I'd know better than that. Then he told her to put me back in the first grade in spelling till he came again. I was pretty much ashamed of myself, because we liked Miss Wheeler and I didn't want to get her in a mess with her boss, but Grace got mad. She jumped right out of her seat and told him that it wasn't Miss Wheeler's fault, because we were new there—and that I never could spell *cat* without a *k*, anyway. All the good it did was that he made her stand with her face in a corner till noontime. He said that would "learn her not to sass her elders."

Everybody was talking about old Mr. Lake while we were eating our lunches, and Willie Aldivote dared me to sneak out in the afternoon and put a burdock burr under his saddle. I pretty near lost my nerve, but the more I looked at him, the madder I got, so half-way between recess time and four o'clock I put up two fingers, and Miss Wheeler nodded at me.

Mr. Lake had a two-cinch saddle, and I only had to loosen the back one a little bit so I could get the burr well up under the middle. From then till school let out, I was so nervous I could hardly think at all, but he didn't make me answer any more questions, so I don't think he noticed me.

As soon as Miss Wheeler tapped the school's-out bell we all grabbed our caps and coats and ran for the carriage-shed. The old white mule was tied away over at the east end of the shed, so the boys made a big piece of work about getting their harness down and getting the straps straightened out. All the girls knew about the burr, too, and they stood around twittering and giggling and trying to look as if they didn't see Mr. Lake when he came out and put the bridle on his mule.

Just as soon as he put his foot in the stirrup the old mule went crazy. Mr. Lake let go of the reins and sat kerplunk down against the board fence, and the mule bucked so hard he'd have made a bronco look like a carriage horse. After he had the saddle slewed way over on the side of his belly, he shot right out through the turnstile gate and raced off up the road. As he went through the gate he smashed the turnstile all to pieces and ripped the saddle off. Maybe Miss Wheeler wasn't a very good teacher, but Mr. Lake was. I learned at least a dozen new words from what he said about that old white mule. I was still shaking from being nervous, but Rudolph Haas was as cool as watercress. He went over and helped Mr. Lake get up and asked him if he couldn't drive him home in his buggy.

Of course, Grace had to tell Mother all about Mr. Lake coming to school. While we were eating supper she told about my not being able to spell "Pare a pear with a pair of scissors," and about her being able to bound California, but she didn't mention having to stand with her face in the corner or my putting the burr under Mr. Lake's saddle. The next I heard of it was three or four nights later when we were out milking. Our Holstein cow's tie-up was nearest to the barn door, then came the brindle, so that Father's back was toward her when we were milking. Everything was quiet in the barn, except for the music milk makes when it goes singing down into the buckets, and I was thinking about Two Dog, when Father said, "It's a dangerous thing to put a cockle burr under an old man's saddle. Mr. Lake might have been badly hurt."

I just said, "Yes, sir," and Father never mentioned it again.

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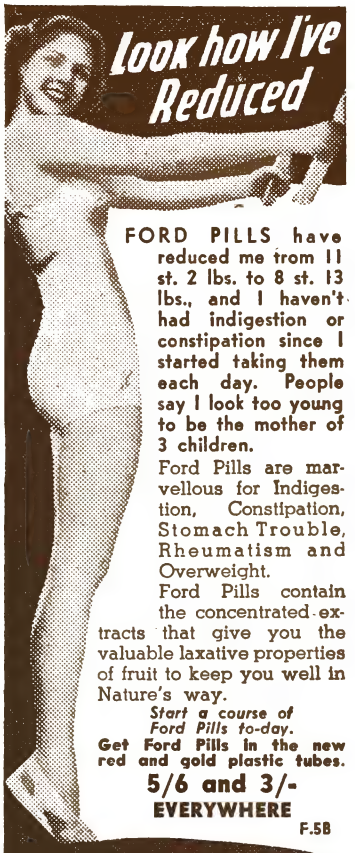

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A Boy and a Gun

(Continued from page 20)

docks with the sweet weight of it pulling him down one side, the smooth feel of the stock, the barrel cool against his palm. Crouching cautiously up on the bank amongst the stones and wait, wait, wait very patiently, just the breeze stirring the bushes, and then —a flick! A white tail! The gun hard by his cheek. Bang! You beauty!

All by himself! No one to say, standing fidgety beside him, "Look sharp, son! Cock her now! Ah ——! Too late!"

Dad was so quick, so deft, he never fumbled. A rabbit appeared, he threw up the gun and shot it. Just like that! He was wonderful.

If he could only go, all by himself. Take his time. No one watching him. Just wait, quietly. He could do it. He knew he could. But they wouldn't let him. Dad was so fussy.

"A gun is a dangerous thing," was what he said. "I know you think you'll be careful. When you're able to handle a gun I'll buy you one of your own. A four hundred and ten Ely, would you like that?" And Dad would look at Mother and grin and say, "That was the dream of my life when I was a lad! A four hundred and ten Ely!"

Of course he would like that! A gun of his own. But how was he to show them that he *could* handle one if they never gave him a chance. It wasn't the same when your father walked beside you, carrying the gun, loading it for you, pointing out the rabbit when it appeared, giving you instructions all the time that made you nervous.

How could *she* know that it was like an ache which somehow became better when he wrote, *On Saturday I took the gun out by myself and shot six rabbits.*

She had made fun of him. When Averil Holmes put about fairies drinking out of bluebells in her essays and Miss O'Loughlin read it out to the school in a treacly voice, no one laughed, although it was all mush. But she had made them laugh at *him.* Silly Jimmy Wake!

"I'd like to kill her," he thought fiercely, and he dug his nib into the geography, making an angry ugly mark. "I'd like to shoot her with the gun!"

HE was still hot in the face when school was let out and Whitey Burns and Tich Watson threw gravel at him while he knelt to pump up his bike tyres, and strutted about mimicking, "Oh, Lily! Does father allow Jimmie to take a gun out by himself?"—"Oh, father! May I have the gun."—"Oh father, I just shot a hundred rabbits for breakfast!"

And as he mounted his bike and slowly pedalled up the school lane, his tormentors pelted after him, shouting, "Bring us a coupla rabbits tomorrow, Wakie! Don't forget!"

Jimmie laboriously pushed his bike up the long tree-lined road. Lily rode ahead, bouncing about on her pony's bare back. She bent low on his neck, urged him to a gallop, and went flying away, her hair losing its ribbon and streaming out behind her.

Lily did everything with speed and verve. There was no hesitation in her. She would be home ages before him, Jimmie thought as he churned mournfully on, his cap pulled low over his eyes. Perhaps she would tell Dad and Mother before he got there. Mother would be sad he put a silly thing like that in his composition. Dad wouldn't say much.

But it wasn't until tea-time that Lily told.

"Jimmie made a fearful ass of himself to-day!" she said airily as though it was not a bit important, and slipped, giggling, behind her father's chair as Jimmie, hating her, made a leap at her. Lily was her father's favourite, too. She finished in a rush, "He put in his composition that he shot six rabbits by himself on Saturday! Old Loggers was *that* sarcastic! You should have heard the kids laugh!"

His mother looked worried. "Surely Miss O'Loughlin didn't think that we'd allow Jimmie . . ."

"Course she didn't! She just took a rise out of him, silly mutt! She said, 'Oh, Lily'—Lily's voice took on an echo of the teacher—'Does father really allow Jimmie to take out a shotgun alone?' I felt such an idiot!"

But even the mimicry of that hated voice was too much for Jimmie. He made a dive for Lily. His father put out a long arm, easily restraining him.

"Leave your sister alone! What did you want to write a thing like that for?"

"Gee, Dad!" Jimmie pleaded, ignoring the question. "Don't you reckon I could take the gun out my myself next Saturday. Don't you, Dad?"

"No! I don't! Even if I did, I wouldn't let you now, putting silly lies in your essay. I'm ashamed of you. Get along outside, both of you!"

Whitey Burns persisted in addressing Jimmie as "Bunny" Wake for a day or two, but that entertainment soon waned and Jimmie Wake and his shooting were forgotten.

Not by Jimmie himself, of course. It had been his quiet dream for a long while to go shooting alone. Now, stung by the teacher's sarcasm, he had become obsessed with the thought. It was twice as galling to realise that he might have had a chance with his father soon, but now the business of the lie in the wretched essay had put him back.

HE rode his bike in his same methodical fashion, he chopped wood and fed the fowls and went after the cows across the paddocks, but in his imagination the gun was with him. Sometimes he rode a piebald pinto up into the Sierras with a rifle lying loosely across the pommel; sometimes he stood at bay in a saloon with his hands reaching like lightning for the Colts at his hips; sometimes he was just a sportsman lying in the tussocks waiting for wild duck. More often he was just Jimmie, but a Jimmie with a wonderful aim, astonishing an applauding crowd as he lit a wax match from twenty yards.

The weekdays crawled by and it was Saturday again. His father was to go to the city on one of his periodic visits.

Jimmie drove him to the station in the gig. He would have liked to be going too. His father knew he was disappointed.

"Sorry I couldn't take you to-day. Look after the place, won't you, son?"

He drove back along the sunny road. It was a lovely day. The larks were singing somewhere far up in the blue. It was impossible to be downcast long on such a day . . . a day fit for adventure . . .

Jimmie pulled the long buggy whip out of its socket and laid it across his lap. It became a rifle resting lightly on a leather-fringed knee. He shook the reins across old Brownie's fat rump and said softly through his teeth:

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IN the afternoon his mother and sister went off to a kitchen tea at a neighbour's. Lily came out, very self-conscious in a frilly dress, and flounced into the trap.

Jimmie's mother said in her worried way, "You'll be all right, won't you? There's some ginger bread in the tin if you get hungry. Don't drink all the milk. I want to make a custard. And mind you shut the chickens up before it gets dark!"

Jimmie shut the road gate after they had gone and came back into the yard. The place was very quiet. The chickens were picking around the stable door. The old tabby cat was asleep on top of the coop. The dray stood empty in the yard with its shafts down, and a white hen was having a dust bath beneath it.

He went into the house. The kitchen smelt of soapsuds and fresh-baked cake. The clock ticked loudly on the dresser. The stove was out, and his mother's work shoes, kicked off by the fireplace, looked lonely.

In the corner, behind the woodbox, stood the gun.

Jimmie's heart began to beat fast. He lifted the gun from its nook. It was familiar in his hands. Apart from the shots he had when out with his father, he was allowed to clean and polish it. But to-day it felt different.

He loosened his grip and let the cold blue barrels slide slowly through his hand until the stock rested on the floor.

Dad would give him a belting if he found out. Not that he minded a belting, so much. But Dad had said, "Look after the place." He hadn't said, "Leave that gun alone!"

He heard again that detestable voice saying, "Lily! Does father allow Jimmie . . ."

Leaning the gun against the cold stove, Jimmie stood on the edge of the woodbox, reached up to the shelf and brought down a handful of cartridges. He put them inside his shirt, and, picking up the gun, went out, shutting the door quietly behind him.

As he crossed the yard it seemed his father must catch him at any minute—from the shadowed doorway of the barn . . . from the musky gloom of the cowshed . . . hail him from the distant dairy . . . come out from behind the harrows standing in the yard . . . shout at him from the haystack.

Out in the open paddocks, far away from possible eyes, his spirits rose. The new grass was springy under his feet. The larks were still singing up in the sky. A quail whirred out from under a tussock.

Jimmie jumped a little and the gun barrel swung around against his bare legs. He must remember to be very careful.

He slid the gun under the bottom wire of the fence before he climbed over and picked it up again carefully on the other side. Dad would approve of that.

The thought of his father, far away in the city at this moment, made Jimmie feel rather bleak. He lifted the gun into the crook of his arm and pressed the stock reassuringly against his side.

At the far end of the farm the land dropped sharply to the creek valley. He left the shelter of the last stone wall and found a stiff wind blowing in his face as he came out along the cliff edge. Holding the gun carefully he made his way down amongst the tea tree to an outcrop of rock and wriggled himself comfortable amongst the stones.

In the shelter there he broke open the gun, slipped the two cartridges home, and closed the gun. There he sat, the gun resting along the rock in front of him, and waited.

DOWN below, the creek glinted where the sun struck it on its lazy way around the cliff. The flats were smooth pieces of green, the tops of the grey gums twinkled silver.

A pebble rolled somewhere down the cliff and Jimmie stiffened, but it was only a wren hopping under the bushes. Presently its mate joined it, bravely blue amongst the brown stones. They stood still with their heads cocked, their bright bead eyes unafraid, as Jimmie sat motionless on the rock above them.

Even as Jimmie watched the wrens, a rabbit flickered across the space lower down. He grabbed up the gun and cocked it, but the rabbit had disappeared into a bush. He sat still as a stone, but it did not reappear.

Down on the creek bank a cow meandered along and went crashing through some high, dry reeds. Something white bobbed through the leaves on his right. A rabbit's tail! As he slowly turned the gun in that direction, another rabbit sat up almost directly in front of him, but a fair way down the bank.

Jimmie got excited. Two! Which one? The one in front was the best shot, but he might roll down the bank beyond recovery. The one on the right would have to be

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shot through the intervening leaves. The white tail had stopped bobbing and the rabbit sat motionless, almost the same colour as the loose stones on the cliff face.

The gun wavered. The rabbit in front was a full-grown buck. Even at the distance Jimmie could see his warm, liquid brown eyes turning in his head.

His ears suddenly twitched and he leapt headlong off the rock out of sight. Jimmie swung the gun hard round and fired at the other one as it began to move, but his aim went wide.

Disappointed, he sat back. He was trembling. The loud echoes of the shot, still reverberating around the cliff, seemed shocking. Had anyone heard? Perhaps Mr. Lanning, the neighbour, might be close by in his paddock and at any minute a voice might call roughly, "What are you doing there with a gun, Jimmie Wake?"

But time went by and nothing happened. Away across the creek Jimmie could see a neighbour harrowing, a tiny man with horses like toys pulling against the slight slope of the paddock.

Over there, beyond the point where the team was working, was the place he had been to once with Dad. Under a great big tree, it was, just on dusk, and the rabbits had come out in dozens.

Why not go there now? He sat up, excited, with his elbows on the rock in front. It was not so very far. He had no watch, but the sun was still high. It must be quite early.

He picked up the gun, scrambled back up the cliff, and headed for the track down to the creek.

The path led down between a cleft in two large boulders. Jimmie sprang down there, one hand flat on a boulder, landing lightly on the earth beneath. The ground was slippery as he went down, the earth dry and crumbly, the flat stones treacherous under his feet. Near the bottom the track veered around a rabbit warren.

THE ground here was very soft. His foot caved in the earth near a hole and he fell on one knee, the gun sliding away from him down the slope. He scrambled wildly after it, but it caught on a flat stone and swivelled round. Jimmie's stretched hand just touched the barrel. He grabbed at it and dragged it back up again to him, bumping and scraping against the stones and brambles. He thought for a second of possible damning scratches, and then headlong on top of that thought another struck him and turned him sick with horror.

Here he was, hauling a gun up by the barrel.

"I might have shot myself!" he thought, and his legs seemed to give way under him with fright. He sat down in the dust of the track, and shakily drew the gun up the rest of the way, taking good care to hold the barrel away.

It was some minutes before he could continue on down the cliff, then, just as he came down to the level ground, a rabbit ran along in front of him. He tried feverishly to re-load, but he was not quick enough and the rabbit disappeared into the stone wall that bounded the creek front.

Thoroughly disgusted, he plodded along the creek to the crossing. It was a fair walk to the spot he had in mind, and by the time he reached it, it seemed dark and dismal.

He sat down behind the wire-netting fence and started his vigil again. Some sheep came nibbling up under the great old gum that spread its branches over the bank. The noise will scare them if I fire, Jimmie thought, and threw small stones at them to drive them away.

Quiet settled down again after a minute. A magpie dug for worms under a fallen log. A spider was spinning a web across the fence.

He began to feel cramp in his legs, his eyes grew blurry with concentrating on the ground under the tree, where, on that memorable evening he had seen the rabbits come to feed and gambol in the dusk.

He shut his eyes for a second to relieve them, shook his head and looked again, for, like magic, two rabbits had appeared and were quietly feeding under the tree. And there was a third, a little way off! Another came loping down the track alongside the fence, and while he stifled his astonishment three bobbed up out of the ground by the tree. There was evidently a burow there.

Seven rabbits, all close together! Surely he could get *one* of them! I must be calm, he thought. I must be like Dad.

His fingers closed on the trigger. The explosion shattered the quiet. Jimmie fell back, knocked off balance by the recoil. All but one of the rabbits were fleeing. Jimmie yelled and scrambled to his feet. Then, despite his excite-

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ment, he remembered the gun and laid it down carefully.

When he looked up again the remaining rabbit was nowhere to be seen. He raced towards the clump of grass on the verge of the bank. He was so certain he would see the rabbit lying bloodstained and twitching just over the brink, that he could not believe it was not there. He stared stupidly down. There was just a short, sheer drop in the raw clay bank, a few inches of sodden turf, and then the water. Where was his rabbit?

JIMMIE raced distractedly up and down the bank, peering over, thinking that perhaps it had fallen clear into the creek and had been carried downstream, but there was no sign of a rabbit floating in the brown water; but just under the brink of the grass, was an outlet to the burrow. The rabbit might have struggled in there, he thought, with a return of hope, and poked about with a long stick, but to no avail. He fossicked disconsolately for it far along the bank, searching amongst the loose stones and tussocks. There was no rabbit.

He came back dejectedly across the grass under the tree to get the gun, unloading it and tossing the spent cartridge petulantly into the creek. The shadow of the big tree had lengthened out across the flat. It was growing dark.

"I'll have to hurry," he told himself, suddenly startled, "or they'll be home!"

The climb up the far bank was heavy going. The gun that had cradled so snugly in his arm now dragged him down. The wind was blowing strong and bleakly across the paddocks and as he began to jog trot across the last stretch it dried his panting mouth and made his throat hurt. His eyes were sore from the tears he had withheld.

He spurred himself on as he came in sight of the dark cluster of the homestead. The first straggle of cows were moving up from the pasture. It must be nearly milking-time.

He dodged around the back of the cowshed, praying silently that his mother and Lily would not yet be home.

The yard was still empty, and he breathed a sigh of relief as he pushed the gun under the wires and climbed the fence. But as he dropped to the ground on the other side he realised that there was a great commotion going on over at the fowlyard.

He ran around the stable. Through the wire he could see a wild struggling of feathers in the front pen. The chickens hadn't been shut up!

The mother hen was squawking wildly outside the wire, beating her wings and leaping high in the air. Something was pouncing amongst the chickens as they scattered in all directions. What was it?

A hawk, fierce-eyed and arrogant, rose from the ground as Jimmie raced up, and to his astonishment flew to the top of the wire netting, a chicken clutched in its talons.

Jimmie jerked up the gun, while the hawk, poised upon the fence, watched him with a wild, contemptuous eye. But,

"Proper sport, isn't he? Doing this one blindfolded for a bet."

of course, the gun was not loaded. He fumbled desperately for cartridges, but just as he rammed them home and closed the breech, the hawk indolently took wing, soared up over the fowlyard and hovered, its great wings spread, the chicken a white blur in its claw. He threw up the gun and fired.

ON Monday afternoon the wind was blowing a gale around the schoolhouse. The children trooped in after lunch, red-cheeked, and hair tossed from the buffeting with the wind, glad for once to be back inside. After the icy wildness of the playground the schoolroom seemed a snug haven. The sharp sunshine was trapped against the rear windows and fell across the back desks, and the room smelled cosily of wood-smoke from the fire.

While the monitors clumped up the aisles handing out the essay books, Miss O'Loughlin took her place at the desk where she could enjoy the sun on her back while she took the third grade reading.

"The essay for the fifth and sixth grades," she announced, "will be *The Happiest Day of My Life!*"

There were immediate sighs at this and some of the little girls in the teacher's favour rolled up their eyes.

"Oh! It's too *hard*!"

"Nonsense!" Miss O'Loughlin embraced the class with a sharp smile. "I'm sure all of you have experienced a particular day when you've had perhaps a nice picnic, or a trip to the seaside, or a birthday, that you remember above all others. I want you to write about that."

The little girls made eloquent faces at each other. The little boys looked grimly dismayed.

"I trust," she went on, with heavy sarcasm, "that the subject will appeal to the erudite Mr. Wake!"

Jimmie Wake came back to earth with a start. He had been dreaming out of the window at the clouds scudding across the cold blue sky over the shivering sugar gums. His ears grew pink as he drew his exercise book to him and opened it.

"Well, Jimmie? Are we to be treated to some further flights of your fancy to-day?" The children giggled dutifully. The third grade, already bored with standing, scraped their feet, hoping this was not going to last too long. "What do you think, Lily? Did you tell father how our James had been drawing on his imagination?"

Somewhat surprisingly, Jimmie Wake lifted his cowed head. Across the aisle his mild blue eyes met the bright ones of his sister. There was, in the look they exchanged, an unspoken bond, the profound alliance of blood.

Lily looked away and tossed her thick plait back over her shoulder. She looked back at the teacher a shade defiantly. "I think he'll write what's true, to-day, Miss O'Loughlin."

Jimmie took up his pen. He ruled his composition book neatly in red ink. In his tidy, round hand he wrote the title, *The Happiest Day of My Life*, and beneath that, *by Jim Wake*.

The happiest day of my life, he began, *was Saturday.*

Against the smooth seat-back he cautiously moved his shoulders. The place on his back where the end of the strap had caught him still stung a little. He rubbed it a little harder, and moved his round thighs, rememberingly, against the form. Gee! Dad was strong!

The shadow of a grin stretched the corners of his stolid mouth as he took up his pen again.

On Saturday, wrote Jimmie Wake, *I shot a hawk!* ●

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Classic of the Month

The Outcasts of Poker Flat

By BRET HARTE

Bret Harte in 1875.

AS Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the twenty-third of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. Two or three men, conversing earnestly together, ceased as he approached, and exchanged significant glances There was a Sabbath lull in the air, which, in a settlement unused to Sabbath influences, looked ominous.

Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of any predisposing cause, was another question.

"I reckon they're after somebody," he reflected; "likely it's me."

He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was "after somebody." It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard to two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies. It is but due to the sex, however, to say that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment.

MR. OAKHURST was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a possible example, and a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets of the sums he had won from them. "It's agin justice," said Jim Wheeler, "to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp—an entire stranger — carry away our money." But a crude sentiment of equity residing in the breasts of those who had been fortunate enough to win from Mr. Oakhurst overruled this narrower local prejudice.

Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with philosophic calmness, none the less coolly, that he was aware of the hesitation of the judges. He was too much of a gambler not to accept fate. With him life was at best an uncertain game, and he recognised the usual percentage in favour of the dealer.

A body of armed men accompanied the deported wickedness of Poker Flat to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, who was known to be a coolly desperate man, and for whose intimidation the armed escort was intended, the expatriated party consisted of a young woman familiarly known as "The Duchess"; another, who had won the title of "Mother Shipton"; and "Uncle Billy," a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard. The cavalcade provoked no comments from the spectators, nor was any word uttered by the escort. Only when the gulch which marked the uttermost limit of Poker Flat was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

AS the escort disappeared, their pent-up feelings found vent in a few hysterical tears from The Duchess, some bad language from Mother Shipton, and a Parthian volley of expletives from Uncle Billy. The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out, to the repeated statements of The Duchess that she would die in the road, and to the alarming oaths that seemed to be

BRET HARTE could be called the "Father of the Western Story," for, although they were not particularly well received in America in his time his tales of the Californian goldfields are the direct ancestors of many thousands of successful novels and stories which have appeared since.

The work that was to inspire so many later writers arose out of a life of poverty, struggle and domestic unhappiness. Born at Albany, New York State, in 1836, Bret Harte went to work at the age of 13 to help his widowed mother and the family. Later, they moved to California where, after trying several dead-end pursuits, the young man became a compositor on a San Francisco newspaper.

A voracious reader, particularly of the works of Charles Dickens, then at the height of his fame, Harte decided to make literature his career, and became a contributor of verse and prose to various periodicals, gaining so high a local reputation that he eventually obtained a position in the Mint, holding it for what were probably the happiest six years of his life.

In 1868, he left it to become editor of the "Overland Monthly," the magazine in which this story first appeared, but at the end of three years, when he went to New York, his writing had already begun to decline in quality, a circumstance the more tragic because of his wife's extravagant tastes and his own carelessness in money matters.

Before long, he was almost bankrupt, and was glad to take a position in the United States Consular Service, being appointed to Crefeld, in Rhenish Prussia. In 1880, he was promoted to Glasgow, but lost the appointment five years later, and thenceforward made a mediocre living by writing for English publications.

In 1902 he died, never having fulfilled the promise of his early years, so notably exhibited in "The Outcasts of Poker Flat." Bret Harte's real success came in the work of those who followed him.

bumped out of Uncle Billy as he rode forward.

With the easy good humour characteristic of his class, he insisted upon exchanging his own riding-horse, "Five Spot," for the sorry mule which The Duchess rode. But even this act did not draw the party into any closer sympathy. The young woman readjusted her somewhat draggled plumes with a feeble, faded coquetry; Mother Shipton eyed the possessor of "Five Spot" with malevolence; and Uncle Billy included the whole party in one sweeping anathema.

The road to Sandy Bar—a camp that, not having as yet experienced the regenerating influences of Poker Flat, consequently seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants—lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant—a day's severe travel. In that advanced season, the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foothills into the dry, cold bracing air of the Sierras. The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon The Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted.

The spot was singularly wild and impressive. A wooded amphitheatre, surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley. It was, undoubtedly, the most suitable spot for a camp, had camping been advisable. But Mr. Oakhurst knew scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished, and the party was not equipped or provisioned for delay. This fact he pointed out to his companions curtly, with a philosophic commentary on the folly of "throwing up their hand before the game was played out." But they were furnished with liquor, which in this emergency stood them in place of food, fuel, rest, and prescience. In spite of his remonstrances, it was not long before they were more or less under its influence. Uncle Billy passed rapidly from a bellicose state into one of stupor, The Duchess became maudlin, and Mother Shipton snored. Mr. Oakhurst alone remained erect, leaning against a rock, calmly surveying them.

MR. OAKHURST did not drink. It interfered with a profession which required coolness, impassiveness, and presence of mind, and, in his own language, he "couldn't afford it." As he gazed at his recumbent fellow-exiles, the loneliness begotten of his pariah-trade, his habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him. He bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits, and for a moment forgot his annoyance. The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him. Yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity for which he was notorious. He looked at the gloomy walls that rose a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines around him; at the sky, ominously clouded; at the valley below, already deepening into shadow. And, doing so, suddenly he heard his own name called.

A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh open face of the newcomer Mr. Oakhurst recognised Tom Simson, otherwise known as "The Innocent" of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a "little game," and had, with perfect equanimity, won the entire fortune—amounting to some forty dollars—of that guileless youth. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door, and thus addressed him: "Tommy, you're a good little man, but you can't gamble worth a cent. Don't try it over again." He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted slave of Tom Simson.

THERE was a remembrance of this in his boyish and enthusiastic greeting of Mr. Oakhurst. He had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune. "Alone?" No, not exactly alone; in fact (a giggle), he had run away with Piney Woods. Didn't Mr. Oakhurst remember Piney? She that used to wait on the table at the Temperance House? They had been engaged a long time, but old Jake Woods had objected, and so they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were. And they were tired out, and how lucky it was they had found a place to camp, and company! All this The Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged from behind the pine tree, where she had been blushing unseen, and rode to the side of her lover.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate. He retained, however, his presence of mind sufficiently to kick Uncle Billy, who was about to say something, and Uncle Billy was sober enough to recognise in Mr. Oakhurst's kick a superior power that would not bear trifling. He then endeavoured to dissuade Tom Simson from delaying further, but in vain.

He even pointed out the fact that there was no provisions, nor means of making a camp. But, unluckily, The Innocent met this objection by assuring the party that he was provided with an extra mule loaded with provisions, and by the discovery of a rude attempt at a log house near the trail.

"Piney can stay with Mrs. Oakhurst," said The Innocent, pointing to The Duchess, "and I can shift for myself."

Nothing but Mr. Oakhurst's admonishing foot saved Uncle Billy from bursting into a roar of laughter. As it was, he felt compelled to retire up the canyon until he could recover his gravity. There he confided the joke to the tall pine trees, with many slaps of his leg, contortions of his face, and the usual profanity. But when he returned to the party, he found them seated by a fire—for the air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast—in apparently amicable conversation. Piney was actually talking in an impulsive, girlish fashion to The Duchess, who was listening with an interest and animation she had not shown for many days.

The Innocent was holding forth, apparently with equal effect, to Mr. Oakhurst and Mother Shipton, who was actually relaxing into amiability. "Is this yer a damned

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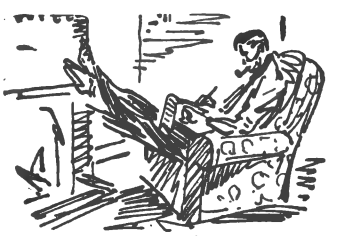

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picnic?" said Uncle Billy, with inward scorn, as he surveyed the sylvan group, the glancing firelight, and the tethered animals in the foreground. Suddenly an idea mingled with the alcoholic fumes that disturbed his brain. It was apparently of a jocular nature, for he felt impelled to slap his leg again and cram his fist into his mouth.

AS the shadows crept slowly up the mountain, a slight breeze rocked the tops of the pine trees, and moaned through their long and gloomy aisles. The ruined cabin, patched and covered with pine boughs, was set apart for the ladies. As the lovers parted, they unaffectedly exchanged a kiss, so honest and sincere that it might have been heard above the swaying pines. The frail Duchess and the malevolent Mother Shipton were probably too stunned to remark upon this last evidence of simplicity, and so turned without a word to the hut. The fire was replenished, the men lay down before the door, and in a few minutes were asleep.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it—snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered; they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

THE momentary excitement brought Mr. Oakhurst back to the fire with his usual calm. He did not waken the sleepers. The Innocent slumbered peacefully, with a smile on his good-humoured, freckled face; the virgin Piney slept beside her frailer sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians, and Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his moustaches and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a mist of snowflakes, that dazzled and confused the eye. What could be seen of the landscape appeared magically changed. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words—"snowed in."

A careful inventory of the provisions, which, fortunately for the party, had been stored within the hut, and so escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that with care and prudence they might last ten days longer.

"That is," said Mr. Oakhurst, *sotto voce* to The Innocent, "if you're willing to board us. If you ain't—and perhaps you'd better not—you can wait till Uncle Billy gets back with provisions."

For some occult reason, Mr. Oakhurst could not bring himself to disclose Uncle Billy's rascality, and so offered the hypothesis that he had wandered from the camp and had accidentally stampeded the animals. He dropped a warning to The Duchess and Mother Shipton who, of course, knew the facts of their associate's defection.

"They'll find out the truth about us *all* when they find out anything," he added significantly, "and there's no good frightening them now."

TOM SIMSON not only put all his worldly store at the disposal of Mr. Oakhurst, but seemed to enjoy the prospect of their enforced seclusion. "We'll have a good camp for a week, and then the snow'll melt, and we'll all go back together." The cheerful gaiety of the young man and Mr. Oakhurst's calm infected the others. The Innocent, with the aid of pine boughs, extemporised a thatch for the roofless cabin, and The Duchess directed Piney in the rearrangement of the interior with a taste and tact that opened the blue eyes of that provincial maiden to their fullest extent.

"I reckon now you're used to fine things at Poker Flat," said Piney.

The Duchess turned away sharply to conceal something that reddened her cheeks through their professional tint, and Mother Shipton requested Piney "not to chatter." But when Mr. Oakhurst returned from a weary search for the trail, he heard the sound of happy laughter echoed from the rocks. He stopped in some alarm, and his first thoughts naturally reverted to the whisky, which he had prudently *cached*.

"And yet it don't somehow sound like whisky," said the gambler.

It was not until he caught sight of the blazing fire through the still blinding storm and the group around it, that he settled to the conviction that it was "square fun."

Whether Mr. Oakhurst had *cached* his cards with the whisky as something debarred the free access of the community, I cannot say. It was certain that, in Mother Shipton's words, he "didn't say cards once" during that evening. Haply the time was beguiled by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. Notwithstanding some difficulties attending the manipulation of this instrument, Piney Woods managed to pluck several reluctant melodies from its keys, to an accompaniment by The Innocent on a pair of bone castanets. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp-meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation. I fear that a certain defiant tone and Covenanter's swing to its chorus, rather than any devotional quality, caused it speedily to infect the others, who at last joined in the refrain:

I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
And I'm bound to die in His Army.

The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled above the miserable group, and the flame

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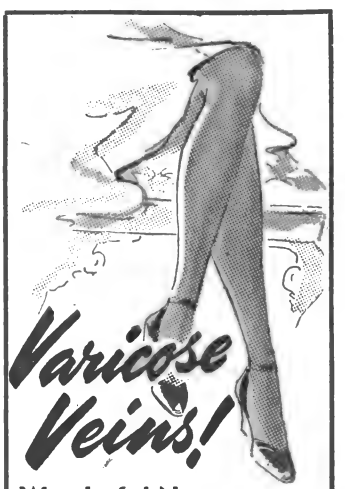

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of their altar leaped heavenward, as if in token of the vow.

AT midnight the storm abated, the rolling clouds parted, and the stars glittered keenly above the sleeping camp. Mr. Oakhurst, whose professional habits had enabled him to live on the smallest possible amount of sleep, in dividing the watch with Tom Simson, somehow managed to take upon himself the greater part of that duty. He excused himself to The Innocent by saying that he had "often been a week without sleep."

"Doing what?" asked Tom.

"Poker!" replied Oakhurst, sententiously; "when a man gets a streak of luck—nigger-luck—he don't get tired. The luck gives in first. Luck," continued the gambler, reflectively, "is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it's bound to change. And it's finding out when it's going to change that makes you. We've had a streak of bad luck since we left Poker Flat — you come along, and slap you get into it, too. If you can hold your cards right along you're all right. For," added the gambler, with cheerful irrelevance:

I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
And I'm bound to die in His Army.

THE third day came, and the sun, looking through the white-curtained valley, saw the outcasts divide their slowly decreasing store of provisions for the morning meal. It was one of the peculiarities of that mountain climate that its rays diffused a kindly warmth over the wintry landscape, as if in regretful commiseration of the past. But it revealed drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut — a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still clung. Through the marvellously clear air the smoke of the pastoral village of Poker Flat rose miles away.

Mother Shipton saw it, and from a remote pinnacle of her rocky fastness, hurled in that direction a final malediction. It was her last vituperative attempt, and perhaps for that reason was invested with a certain degree of sublimity. It did her good, she privately informed The Duchess. "Just you go out there and cuss, and see." She then set herself to the task of amusing "the child," as she and The Duchess were pleased to call Piney. Piney was no chicken, but it was a soothing and original theory of the pair thus to account for the fact that she didn't swear and wasn't improper.

When night crept up again through the gorges, the reedy notes of the accordion rose and fell in fitful spasms and long-drawn gasps by the flickering campfire. But music failed to fill entirely the aching void left by insufficient food, and a new diversion was proposed by Piney — story-telling. Neither Mr. Oakhurst nor his female companions caring to relate their personal experiences, this plan would have failed, too, but for The Innocent.

Some months before he had chanced upon a stray copy of Mr. Pope's ingenious translation of the *Iliad*. He now proposed to narrate the principal incidents of that poem—having thoroughly mastered the argument and fairly forgotten the words—in the current vernacular of Sandy Bar. And so for the rest of that night the Homeric demigods again walked the earth. Trojan bully and wily Greek wrestled in the winds, and the great pines in the canyon seemed to bow to the wrath of the son of Peleus. Mr. Oakhurst listened with quiet satisfaction. Most especially was he interested in the fate of "Ashheels," as The Innocent persisted in denominating the "Swift-footed Achilles."

So with small food and much of Homer and the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snowflakes were sifted over the land. Day by day, closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half-hidden in the drifts.

And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other's eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton—once the strongest of the party — seemed to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side.

"I'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous weakness. "But don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head and open it."

Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched.

"Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney.

"You've starved yourself," said the gambler.

"That's what they call it," said the woman, querulously, as she lay down again, and turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and Homer was forgotten. When the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took The Innocent aside, and showed him a pair of snow-shoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack-saddle.

"There's one chance in a hundred to save her yet," he said, pointing to Piney; "but it's there," he added, pointing towards Poker Flat. "If you can reach there in two days, she's safe."

"And you?" asked Tom Simson.

"I'll stay here," was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace.

"You are not going, too?" said The Duchess, as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him.

"As far as the canyon," he replied. He turned suddenly, and kissed The Duchess, leaving her pallid face aflame, and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then The Duchess, feeding the fire, found that someone had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking into each other's faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke; but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around The Duchess's waist. They kept this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rending asunder the protecting pines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, which gradually died away. As the embers slowly blackened, The Duchess crept closer to Piney, and broke the silence of many hours:

"Piney, can you pray?"

"No, dear," said Piney, simply.

The Duchess, without knowing exactly why, felt relieved, and, putting her head upon Piney's shoulder, spoke no more. And so reclining, the young and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep.

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine boughs, flew like white-winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon, through the rifted clouds, looked down upon what had been the camp. But all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.

THEY slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told, from the equal peace that dwelt upon them, which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognised this, and turned away, leaving them still locked in each other's arms.

But at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie knife. It bore the following, written in pencil, in a firm hand:

BENEATH THIS TREE
LIES THE BODY
OF
JOHN OAKHURST

Who struck a streak of bad luck on the 23rd of November, 1850,

and handed in his checks on the 7th December, 1850.

And pulseless and cold, with a derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat. ●

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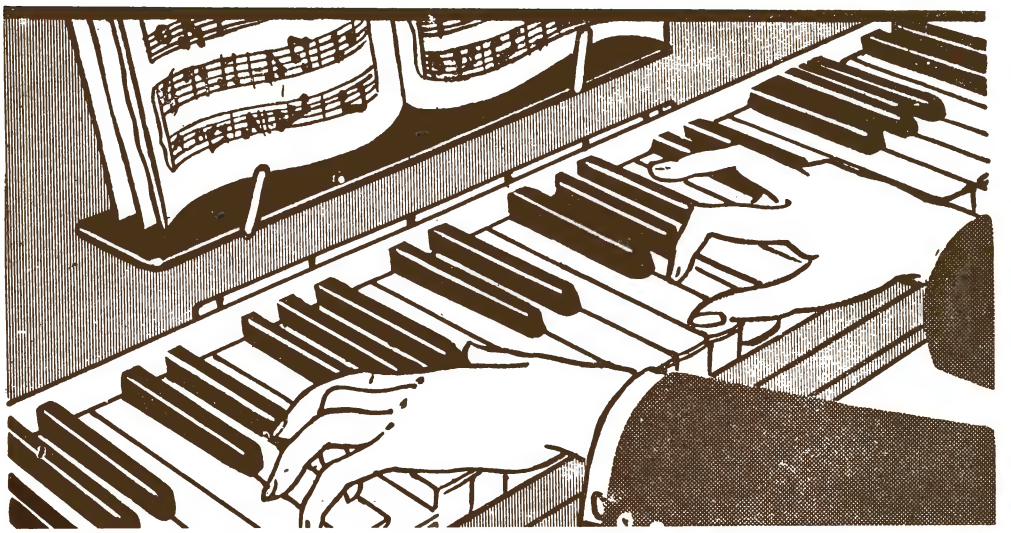

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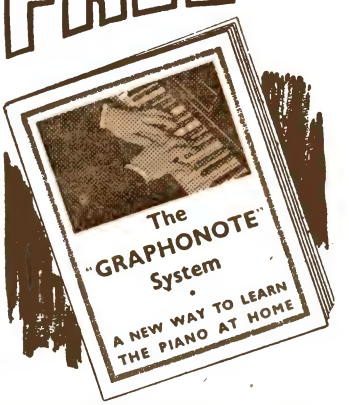

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The Explorer

(Continued from page 23)

mongo, Arabic, Portuguese and English, for of all things that his soul loathed it was the coming among his people of the devil *ginni*, which stole away men's brains.

"O'Feli's back in the Territories," said Sanders at breakfast one morning.

"What, my jolly old pal, dear old Excellency?" asked Bones.

"He's no pal of mine," said Sanders shortly. "He's running gin across the Green Lands."

Even Bones looked grave at this information and asked quietly when the Commissioner wanted him to leave.

This time when Bones went up the river in the *Wiggle*, Bosambo sat on the head of the loquacious gossip-man so that no news of Tibbetti's coming preceded him.

His young face grew graver as he made his way through the Inner N'Gombi, for he came upon whole villages helplessly drunk, their crops untended, their goats straying where they would; and he came at last in no amiable mood to the village of Oofesi to learn that the rum-runner was not half a day's march ahead of him.

Unconscious of his danger, O'Feli did not hurry on his way back to the Green Lands. Indeed, his porters sweating beneath loads of salt and brass rods, could not have gone much quicker, and Bones and his half-dozen Houssas came up with the loaded column on the very edge of the Green Lands themselves. O'Feli, deciding that life was better than profit, bolted for the marshland, leaving his loot behind.

"Abiboo," said Bones to his sergeant "take these men with your soldiers. O'Feli is my meat."

The man was too far ahead to make any sort of practice with a revolver and Bones saved his breath to run the other down. It was when the two men were several miles into the great swamp, with not four hundred yards between them, that there came a sudden queer moan in the air, followed immediately by a sharp drop in temperature.

"Oh, lawks!" groaned Bones dismally, and looked round for suitable shelter.

There were three stunted trees growing together upon an island of hard soil and he flung himself down among their tangled roots, sharing the refuge with two snakes, which were too concerned with their own fear to resent his presence. And then the whirlwind, M'Shimba-M'Shamba, himself, struck.

The light went out of the sky as if it had been switched off by a giant hand and the world was instantly a mad roaring chaos, filled with the malignity of all ghosts and devils. Bones' topee was ripped from his head, chinstrap and all, and he burrowed frantically in among the roots, nor cared for the coiled sinuous things which were not an inch from his head. And then something struck him behind the ear and he went down into utter darkness.

IT was Sergeant Abiboo who made his way to the nearest village possessing a runner and the message came down the river, passed from tribe to tribe. Hamilton heard it as he was shaving and he jerked and cut himself.

"'Tibbetti . . . goes . . . land of green,'" spelt Hamilton, ignoring the blood dripping from his chin. "'Son of Sandi . . . does not come . . . a day . . . and yet a day . . . and yet a day.'"

Hamilton wiped the lather from his face and was in Sanders' office in twenty seconds flat. He found the Commissioner already writing a message which would go to Bosambo by pigeon immediately. It ordered the Ochori chief to go north, make contact with Abiboo and do whatever was necessary to find and help the Lord Tibbetti.

Then silence closed down and Sanders and the Houssa Captain spent an anxious further three days before a tired pigeon came fluttering to headquarters with the news that Bones had returned from the Green Lands and was on his way downstream in the *Wiggle*. Their thankfulness was qualified by a further pigeon message from Bosambo which said that Tibbetti had behaved in a manner very strange and wonderful to witness.

The strangeness of Bones' manner was immediately obvious when the young man stepped ashore upon the Residency's tiny dock.

"I'm most infernally glad to see you, Bones," said Hamilton heartily as he wrung his subordinate's hand. "When you followed that fellow into the swamps we were really anxious about you. You all right?"

"Thank you, sir," said Bones quietly, "I'm in the pink."

The quiet answer was so unlike Bones' usual ebullience that Hamilton wondered and eyed the large bump on the back of his subaltern's head with some anxiety.

The two young men walked up to the Residency together and Sanders smiled a greeting.

"Very glad to see you, Bones," said the Commissioner, returning the salute.

Mr. Tibbetts bowed wordlessly and when he was seated on the verandah between the two other men said nothing. Sanders, eyeing the young face, began to share Hamilton's anxiety. Bones was unusually pale and though he was breathing rapidly and noisily through his nose his large mouth was closed so that the lips were compressed.

"Anything wrong?" asked Sanders. "What about O'Feli?"

"Dear, sir," replied Bones. "Had his wicked old neck broken by jolly old M'Shimba-M'Shamba. I found his body."

"Good riddance," said Hamilton.

Suddenly Bones spoke. He addressed himself to Sanders and it was evident to his listeners that he was labouring under the stress of an almost intolerable excitement.

"Dear old Excellency an' almost father," he began, "you, and especially old Ham here, have always thought poor old Bones a bit of a silly ass."

"I shouldn't have said that," said Sanders kindly.

"Well, wicked old Ham here thinks so," insisted Bones doggedly. "Well," he went on with a note of triumph, "I've found it. Myself," he added.

Sanders was puzzled. "You mean you've found yourself?" he suggested.

"Bless your dear old soul, no, sir and respected superior. I mean old Bones, the silly ass, the goop, the laughin'-stock of his disbelievin' superiors, has found what he knew was there all the time—the lost civilisation! Jolly old Rome an' things."

"This smack on the head you've had," said Hamilton, "had better be looked at, Bones."

"There's nothin' the matter with my nut, Ham," he expostulated, waving his hands violently. "I tell you I've seen it. Orgies and slaves, Ham, and jolly old Caesar and ghastly tripe like that."

Sanders frowned, and leaning across felt the young man's pulse. It was a bit fast but nothing out of the ordinary, and the skin of his bony wrist was cool and normal to the touch. It was the Commissioner who reduced Bones' incoherence to a prompted and steady narrative.

IT seemed that when the hurricane had passed and Bones came to his senses the trees under which he had refuged had been torn up and he had no means of knowing how they had been standing and thus assessing his direction. He fired several shots from his revolver in the hope that Abiboo might reply, but there was no answer.

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"There was I, dear old Excellency, in the middle of a howlin' wilderness and not knowin' my ankle from my elbow. So I just started walkin' and after several hours I came out on solid ground. And there I found Rome."

"What, just turned in at the doors of the Capitol?" scoffed Hamilton.

"Don't be ignorant, dear old Ham, that's in America."

Again Sanders intervened. According to Bones he had topped a small hill and looked down into the country beyond. There, according to his description, was a city of wondrous stone buildings set down in the midst of exotic gardens. He described the place in detail with its marble courtyards and fountains, its stone-edged pools and loggias, its marble benches and ilex-lined walks.

"Honestly, my dear, three feet if it was an inch."

"And the people, dear old Excellency!"

"Here come the girls," said Hamilton.

Bones gaped at him. "How did you know?" he asked. "There were Romans in togs and things."

"Togas?" suggested Sanders smiling.

"That's the thing," nodded Bones, "like big bath-towels chucked over one shoulder and leaving the other arm free. And the girls, Ham," he shook his head in wonderment at what he was attempting to describe.

"I was met by a decent sort of chap in a big toga with a lot of leaves round his head."

"A white man?" suggested Hamilton incredulously. "Go on, Bones, this is good."

"Of course he was," said the latter indignantly. "He was the one whom the others called Caesar. It was about the only thin' I could understand," he admitted, "because I never was much good at Latin at Clifton."

He went on to describe how he had been received and treated with kindness and consideration.

"I was taken into one of the houses which was all marble and gilt like the jolly old Regent Palace and had a two-faced johnny on the doorpost."

"What's that?" asked Sanders sharply.

"Fact, dear old Excellency. A sort of carving of a man's head with two faces lookin' in opposite directions. Looked as if he didn't know whether he was comin' or goin'."

Sanders stared in silence, for Bones had described the old Roman deity Janus, who was the god of doorways.

"Go on, Bones," urged the Commissioner softly, and Hamilton, noting his superior's tone, widened his eyes in surprise.

Mr. Tibbetts described in detail his three days' stay which culminated in what he called a "party," which might have come straight from the pages of Martial or Juvenal.

"It was simply fearfully awful, jolly old sir," said Bones, mopping his brow at what he was thinking. "When the slaves — they were natives — had retired, the party got under way. It was awful," he ended unhappily. "Everyone except poor old Bones was as tight as a tick. I kept my jolly old peepers closed. Gosh, you wouldn't believe what happened." And in stammered incoherent sentences he told them.

"Bones!" roared Hamilton. "How dare you trot out the figments of your imagination before the Commissioner?"

Bones was speechless with indignation, and at length he turned to Sanders and said, "You don't think I'd tell you a story I'd made up, do you, dear and understandin' superior?"

Sanders shook his head. "No, I don't," he replied, staring at the young man queerly and he went on to ask him questions:

"This man," he said, "whom you say was addressed as Caesar, did he wear a toga?"

Bones nodded.

"Did it have a coloured border?"

Again Bones nodded.

"The imperial purple, I suppose?" scoffed Hamilton.

To his surprise and Sanders' excitement Bones miserably shook his head. "No, it wasn't," he confessed.

"Was it scarlet?" asked Sanders, breathing rather quickly.

"Yes. How did you know, dear old sir?"

"There is a very common fallacy," said Sanders slowly, "regarding the colour of the imperial purple. It was made from the old Tyrrhenian dye and the colour it produced was what to-day we know as scarlet."

Hamilton's jaw dropped and even Bones regarded the Commissioner open-mouthed.

"D'you mean, sir . . ." began the Houssa Captain.

The Commissioner shook his head. "I don't know," he said uneasily, "but Bones has had an experience which must be investigated."

After dinner that night at the Residency the three men got out topographical maps of the Territories and studied the line of Bones' march.

"I wonder if you got into Portuguese territory," speculated Sanders. "The line of demarcation is very inexact and we have no maps on a large enough scale to check. I'll wire Lagos to see if they've anything showing the country in any greater detail."

It was just before tiffin the following day that Administration sent a telegraphed message. The native clerk brought the flimsy to Sanders as he sat upon the verandah. It read:

Portuguese authorities request confirmation of safe return to N'Gombi of Houssa officer who was guest at Civitas Silvae.

A great light dawned upon Sanders, but it was typical of him that until he was certain he said nothing to either of his subordinates. He made a signal to Administration and a week later the mail-boat brought him an answer. Though the letter was on official notepaper, it was penned personally by the Permanent Secretary at Lagos.

After the usual preliminaries it went on:

It seems that this fellow, Manoel Da Silva, when he came out of quod, decided to get away from it all to some place where he could fully express his own vivid, if doubtful, ego. He is definitely eccentric, if not entirely mad, and has founded a bogus Roman settlement off the map and up-country in Portuguese territory. He seems to be very thorough if an unqualified stinker and I am told that his settlement, which he has called the City of Silva, is an artistic miracle. A number of his friends and hangers-on went with him into their self-appointed exile together with a bunch of houris who were only too pleased to tag along behind a multi-millionaire. I gather that young Tibbetts spent a few days at this place and if so he must have been considerably surprised at the goings-on.

Sanders lowered the letter to his knee and sighed. "Bones the explorer," he murmured sadly. "Poor old Bones!" ●

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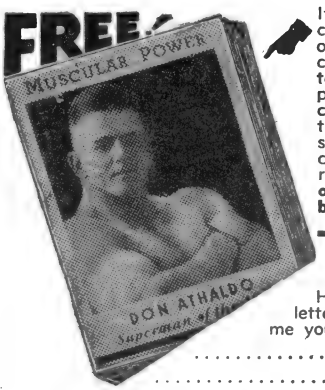

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..... A.J.Aug.'52

Killer in the Valley

By HIRAM SAVAGE

Usually everyone in the valley fought to go after a cougar. But not this one. Silvern was the only man brave enough to hunt her—and he wanted me to go along.

BUCKER flinched and rolled his eyes when I slapped the saddle on to his back. "Yeah, I know," I said, "you're just like everyone else in the valley—scared silly." It was getting so a man looked behind him sixteen times between the house and the barn to see if he was being tailed by a big cougar.

It was a nasty morning and I didn't like starting out any better than the fidgety pack string, but fall was coming and I still had back-country camps to stock. Once it snowed in the mountains there'd be no getting stock through Elkhorn Pass.

Smoky howled and tugged at her chain. She wanted to go, but she had a lot to learn yet. I went over and sat down by her. "Later, girl," I said, patting her head. "As soon's packing season's over we'll run cat all winter."

I was as eager to hunt as she was. Ever since I was a kid and got to know Silvern I'd dreamed of owning a hound like Smoky. Silvern's dog was young then, and sometimes when I'd ride into the back-country I'd come across Silvern and his dog, Boone, looking for cat sign. You never knew where you'd see him. Any place in the big jumble of peaks that hugged the coast you might look up and see Silvern leaning on his rifle, the big hound sitting quietly beside him, watching.

Boone was getting old now, not as fast as he used to be, but I guess he and Silvern had more cougar to their credit than all the rest of the hunters in the country put together. And even Silvern wanted Smoky. He knew that once she was trained she'd be the best in the country. Small, maybe, but fast, and born to hunt. He'd never been known to hunt another dog with Boone, but the last time he'd come down for supplies he'd seen Smoky. He'd stopped, looked at her for a minute, then walked toward her.

Smoky had gone to his outstretched hand. "Thoroughbred black-and-tan," he'd said to himself. He'd run a hand over her long silky ears, and his dark eyes had gleamed as he looked her over. Then he'd turned to me and said, "How much you want for her?"

I'd shaken my head. I wasn't going to sell her at any price. It had been my good luck to find her when I was east of the mountains, looking for pack stock. I wouldn't have traded her for the best saddle horse in Washington.

I lined out the string, jammed my rifle into the scabbard, and started out.

Fog hung like a soggy blanket over the hills, and trailed dismally through the treetops. Bucker sidled and pranced all over the road, and the mules alternated between crowding one another ahead and yanking back. There was a cutbank up ahead, covered with salal and rhododendron. Bucker wheeled under the bank and tried to turn, and I knew as I saw the grey shadow sailing off the bank that the cougar had been with us all morning. He lighted with a snarl on the last mule's back, lashing out with powerful forepaws while the mule bucked and brayed frantically.

I had the rifle half out of the scabbard when the red mule hit Bucker broadside in wild panic. The rifle went flying and I fought to stay in the saddle while Bucker went crazy with the rest of the stock. When I got him quieted I rode on up to McDonald's to get a gun and his dogs.

Ordinarily, when a cougar came into the valley, it was a fight to see who'd get him first. Most of the ranchers kept a bunch of dogs, some good, some useless, but most any of them would take a hot trail, and the bounty came in handy for whoever bagged him. But this one was different. When I told McDonald what had happened, he looked at the sky and said, "Not much chance. It's sure to rain all day and wash the trail out."

I was mad. "Wash it out, hell," I said. "He ain't even

made it yet. That cat's down there right now chewing on my best mule. Grab your rifle and let's take the dogs and go!"

McDonald took his thirty-thirty down off the wall and handed it to me. "Take this if you've a mind to," he said, "but my dogs won't run that cougar, and neither will any other hound in the country that's been anywhere near him."

I opened my mouth, but McDonald went on evenly: "You think I'm scared. Well, I am. That devil just ain't scared of dog or man. He ripped two of my hounds apart and I ain't gonna lose any more. Jackson won't hunt him and neither will Phillips, and if you try that new hound of yours out on him, you ain't got the sense of your dumbest mule."

"Smoky'd run him," I said doggedly, "if you guys would get your hounds together and back her up."

But McDonald just shook his head. I took his rifle and went back to the kill, but the cougar'd eaten his meal and left. The mule's neck was broken, and there were deep gouges that the long claws had ripped in his back and sides. The cougar had clawed through the saddle pad and taken a few bites of the loin, but that was all.

I CAUGHT up the stock again and turned them out to pasture. Then I saddled Bucker and headed for the high country. Silvern wasn't scared, and even if Boone was old he could pick up a trail where no other hound could smell a thing.

The last I'd heard, Silvern was at his camp at Buckhorn, so I rode that way. I found him on a ridge of the high country some fifteen miles back, pulling a coyote set. As usual, he saw me first and stood waiting, his long black hair waving in the wind, his deep-set eyes alert.

"Cougar got Johnny Mule," I told him. "On the cutbank this morning. There ain't a hunter in the country who'll go after it now."

"Did you see it?" Silvern asked.

I nodded, and told him what had happened. Silvern looked solemn and said to himself, "Sounds like the Old Lady. I been wondering where she'd show up next."

He looked for a long time at the sky out across the jagged peaks; then he called

Boone. "We got a couple more sets to pull," he said, "but we'll catch you 'fore you hit the switchbacks."

When we came down off the trail into the road, I had thirty trail miles behind me and I was weary to the last inch. It was still half raining and we were damp and sweaty. Silvern was fresh and alert, aware of everything around him, pointing out a deer in the brush, an owl hunched in a tree, and the marks of a cat on a cedar tree. As soon as we hit the road, he called Boone back to his side, and the big dog whined softly at him, but he couldn't pick up any scent at the kill. It was just dark when we hit the ranch. Jackson and McDonald were at the gate.

"You figuring on hunting that beast?" McDonald asked.

Silvern leaned on the fence and took out his pipe. "Thought I might have a try at it," he said.

"Somebody better do something," Jackson said grimly, "or we'll all go broke."

"Whoever kills him will get the biggest tom this country ever saw," McDonald said.

Silvern squinted up at the night sky with the big fir trees black against it. His mouth turned down at the corners. "Ain't no tom," he said finally. "It's a barren old female, and whoever gets her will earn his bounty."

McDonald looked sceptical. "What makes you so sure it's a female?"

Silvern bit down on his pipe. "Cats are like people. You get to know 'em—by their actions."

"Have you seen her?" I asked.

"No, but I've run her now and again for two years. She used to hang out on the Telsick. Then she crossed and slaughtered on the Northside a while. I knew soon's you mentioned her kill it was the same one."

"How come you ain't killed her?" McDonald demanded.

Silvern smiled wryly. "She likes to run dogs till their feet fall off."

He turned suddenly and looked up the road. Boone sat beside him, watching. "What is it?" Silvern whispered.

BOONE looked bored and lay down again as an old sheep rancher from up-river appeared. He ignored the rest of us when he saw Silvern. "Man, I'm glad to see you. That big cat just got two of my sheep. I tried to get by him to go for my rifle but he just stood there, lashing his tail, daring me. Biggest cougar I ever saw."

He went on, telling his tale, but Silvern wasn't listening. He and Boone were heading up the road. I wanted to go, but I couldn't ask. Silvern was a funny cuss. He was always friendly, and if you ran across him in the hills he always asked you to his camp, but I always felt like an outsider. He and the hills and his dog had something the ordinary person just couldn't reach. Most people called him queer.

He didn't come back that night, or the next. On the third day he came in just after dark. He didn't say much, just fed Boone, patted and talked to Smoky for a minute, then crawled into his bunk. I would have bet he hadn't slept those three days and when I looked at Boone I was sure. Boone's big feet were raw and his ribs hung out. When he finished eating he just flopped and shut his eyes.

Smoky came over and licked daintily at his pan. She gave Boone a look that said "hog" and came over to me. I sat down and she put her nose on my knee and looked up solemnly. I spoke and she got up, walked around me, and came back to thump her tail against my legs. I could hardly wait until snow flew and I could run her on cat.

McDonald and Jackson came by next evening to hear the story. Silvern was sitting in front of the fire, resting his chin in his hands and staring quietly at the flames.

"You didn't get her, I take it," McDonald said.

Silvern shook his head slowly.

"How far'd you run her?" Jackson asked.

Silvern looked up, his eyes bright. "If I tell the truth you won't believe it," he said. He tamped tobacco into his pipe, and nobody said a word. Finally he went on: "We run her up into the crags, then back up into the Crow. We wound up there yesterday when Boone's feet got so sore he couldn't run no more."

"Sure your dog didn't get off on to the trail of another one somewhere along the line?" McDonald asked.

Silvern puffed on his pipe and looked hard at McDonald. "Your dog might make that mistake, but Boone wouldn't," he said.

He wouldn't talk any more then, just sat staring into the fire. His dark eyes were bright with the fire's glow, and every once in a while he'd

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cock an eyebrow like he was asking himself a question.

Three days later Jackson found another of his calves dead in the field next to the river. The cougar had ripped it apart, eaten some of the loin and left the rest. You knew by her kills she wasn't hungry. She never bothered to cover one up and she never came back to one.

"Just kills for the fun of it," Silvern said disgustedly when he looked it over. He sat down, drawing little circles in a patch of sand, while I held the dogs back. Finally he looked up at me with those black, piercing eyes. "Do you want to risk Smoky on the trail of the Old Lady?" he asked slowly.

"You would if she was yours, wouldn't you?" I said.

His answer was short: "What one man does ain't necessarily what the next one will."

I tried to hold my voice steady when I said, "Guess a man's got to figure his dog's expendable if he's gonna run cougar."

Silvern nodded. "But you could run a lot of cougar before you'd find one to expend dogs on as fast as the Old Lady. She nearly got Boone last time, missed him by the thickness of her whiskers."

I looked up in surprise. He hadn't said anything before about being that close to the cat.

"Do you think you could run three days and nights—without stopping?" he asked.

"I could try," I answered. To hunt with Silvern was a favour few men enjoyed.

He looked up to where the rain clouds were piling up. "There's just one way I know to corner that she-devil, if the weather holds and the dogs don't get their feet too cut up . . ."

We went back to the house and got flashlights, our guns, and a little grub. It looked like darn' little to me but Silvern said, "We'll eat cougar meat."

He strapped on his old thirty-thirty Winchester and I stuck my forty-five Colt in my holster, and we were off.

I was glad to see Smoky work. She and Boone rooted out through the pasture, picking up the trail on the far side of the river and heading up the ridge.

THE dogs worked together in perfect agreement, Boone's big bold form in front and Smoky's just smaller one behind him. Her high-pitched wail carried with his booming trail call down through the timber. We climbed steadily up through thick rhododendron and salal until the brush thinned out and the rocks on top of the mountain came in view. I soon found I had callouses in the wrong places. I'd been riding too much.

"Think the dogs will lose the trail in the rocks?" I asked when we stopped for a breather.

Silvern shook his head. "Not here. Watch old Boone pick it up through the rocks. He's got sense enough to know cats jump thirty feet at a time and he figures where they jump to."

We watched the big dog work slowly along, nosing over the smooth rocks, woofing when he found the scent. Smoky looked confused, but she hunted hard at Silvern's command. He looked real pleased at the way she behaved. Boone took the trail on the far side of the ridge and we plunged back into thick brush. And this was just the beginning.

It was late evening when Silvern called a halt. We caught up with Boone and Smoky in the rocks again. They were nosing around, but they had lost the trail. A light rain was falling — the kind that falls along the coast and seems to hang in the air and keep everything saturated.

"She's up to her old tricks," Silvern said. "From now on we go by guess and b'gosh. We'll find a dry spot and spend the night here."

"Won't she be miles away by morning?"

"My guess is she'll figure she's lost the dogs and hole up here on the ridge for the night. That's where we'll fool her. If the weather holds we'll pick up the trail somewhere along the top in the morning."

We found a sheltered place under an overhanging bluff. Out of the rain-soaked hills Silvern grubbed pitchy roots that burned bright and hot the long wet night. I slept, but Silvern sat watching the fire and puffing his pipe, moving only occasionally to throw on more wood or reach over and stroke Boone. Smoky slept beside me the whole night, whimpering in her sleep. Once I opened my eyes and saw Silvern grinning at me. "How much you want for your hound?" he asked.

"Nine hundred ninety-nine dollars," I mumbled, then went back to sleep with my hand on her head. But most of the time when I woke up, Silvern was staring into the fire, his face still and sombre.

In the morning the clouds thinned out. We climbed back up the steep rock-slope and turned the dogs loose. They worked the crest of the ridge slowly. Fog hung on the crags in big ragged patches. Rolling rock made a hollow sound, and Boone's wild bay, joined a second later by Smoky's, thundered and pealed among the crags as the dogs took the trail again.

We caught a glimpse of Boone up in the fog, fighting his way over a big rockslide, slipping back, then lunging ahead. Smoky followed easily, scrambling eagerly after the big dog.

"Now, if the weather will hold, Boone might be able to hang on her tail," Silvern said.

ALL morning we crawled over the side of the mountain, hanging on narrow ledges, working up painfully, boosting the dogs along, only to have the trail go down again over the sheer, slippery pinnacles. The cougar jumped from ledge to ledge, and sometimes Boone took long minutes to find where she'd landed. Smoky began to catch on. She darted here and there, once in a while picking up the track before Boone did and bellowing her discovery to us. She was even better than we'd thought. I felt proud just watching her.

All that day Silvern stayed close to the dogs, urging them on, his eyes glittering with excitement. He moved gracefully over the rocks, never giving a thought to their treachery, leaving me behind to catch up when I could. For long minutes he'd forget I was trailing along behind and he seemed surprised when he looked back and saw me still coming. My feet were raw and I ached all over, but I wasn't going to quit.

After a while Boone began to walk tender-footed over the sharp rocks, and finally Silvern called him up and looked at his feet. "That's her tactics," he said as he turned the old dog loose, "padding over the rocks till a dog's feet are cut to ribbons."

He called Smoky up and looked at her paws, but they weren't bad. "She didn't spend all last week pounding through this junk," Silvern said.

"Think we'll get her this time?" I asked.

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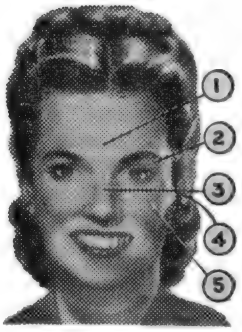

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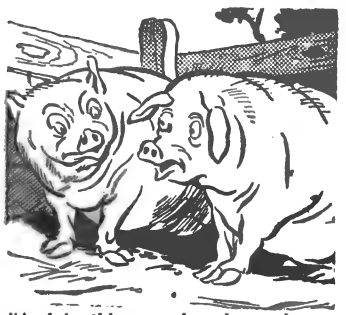
"We might," Silvern said, "but if she trees, watch yourself. So far as she's concerned, we're just more meat on the table."

We went on and Boone's feet got worse, until each step left a trail of blood. We came out on a big slide that fell off into a deep canyon. We could tell we were getting close. The dogs bellowed like mad and took off down the slide. Silvern pointed to the fine shale at our feet, then down the hill. The tracks told the tale. The big cat had hesitated at the top of the slide, paving deep furrows in the rocks, then had gone down the hill with big jumps.

Silvern moved easily, his body moving with the shifting, rolling mass underfoot. I was suddenly dizzy and half sick. My chest heaved and pounded and I fought for breath. We'd run through the crags so long I began to think the whole world was on edge. The cat wasn't anything real any more—more like something I was pursuing in a dream—but I



"And in this recurring dream I am always associated with eggs."

ran on, if only because I'm hardheaded.

Old Boone was limping painfully and Smoky was taking the lead when the shadows started to close in on the valleys. We were near the top, climbing a slope, when we heard Smoky's long, sombre wail. Silvern stopped short and we listened as it rolled and echoed across the canyons.

"She's treed!" Silvern breathed, then sprinted up the hill, leaving me behind.

He was sizing things up when I came along.

Smoky leaped about like a ballet dancer, but Boone was tired. He shook himself and howled to heaven, then sat down and waited. The cougar wasn't in sight but we knew she was in the rocks, trapped by the sheer walls of the top of the mountain. Silvern checked his gun and motioned to me to do the same. He spoke softly to the dogs and moved up into the shadows. "Be ready now," he whispered.

He moved away, and I huddled against a rock and shivered as the mountain wind cut through me. There was an ominous silence, with nothing but the swish of the wind through the crags. Then there was an angry snarl and a shuffling noise. I heard Silvern's warning, but not in time. I caught a flash of the tawny form, the gleam of white teeth and the ugly head with ears laid back. I brought up my Colt, but the cat was already on me and I felt myself going down and the sharp claws ripping up my shoulder.

My wind was gone and I lay on my back, fighting for breath, watching the big cat crouching against the rock, spitting and snarling as Smoky darted at her flanks. Silvern took aim, but the dogs dancing around kept getting in the way. I saw the big cat hunch down, tensing for the spring. Then Boone went for her throat and the two went winding down the hill in a ball, Smoky hot after them. Silvern streaked after them, and as I staggered to my feet I heard the sharp report of his thirty-thirty.

When I got there Silvern was standing over Boone. The old dog lay with his sides ripped open, his insides scattered over the rocks. I looked up at Silvern. No expression crossed his face, but his eyes got hard like granite and his shoulders slumped. I looked back at Boone, but I almost got sick and turned away.

Smoky's yowls cut the air and Silvern wheeled and bolted after her. He ran grimly, urging the pup on, staying right with her. Somehow I made myself go on, swallowing the lump in my throat and wiping the blood off my shoulder as I ran.

Near the top of the mountain, in a little thicket of scrub pine, Smoky bayed "tree" and we went in. The dusk was closing in, and Silvern flashed his light across the hill, quickly at first, then slowly, covering the trees one by one. I caught my breath as the light picked up the glowing, ice-green eyes.

"Catch up the pup," Silvern ordered.

I held Smoky while he moved in. The eyes in the tree weaved threateningly, but Silvern never hesitated. A faint whine came from the cat—a warning—and I heard her clawing at the bark of the pine. The eyes wavered, disappeared for a second, then glowed brightly as Silvern moved up under the tree. Then his gun cracked and Smoky struggled for freedom.

"Let her go," Silvern said wearily. "It's her first cougar."

It was mine too, and I looked the cat over carefully from the strong, white teeth to the thick, powerful tail.

"Never had kits, like I thought," Silvern said. "Fatter'n a hog and meaner'n a hungry wolf."

"Bet she's a record," I said.

"She's a record, all right," Silvern said. "She got the best dog in the state."

He patted and praised Smoky for a minute; then we went down to one of his camps and slept until dawn.

WHEN I woke up, Silvern was coming up the hill with water for coffee. We ate in silence. I felt bad about Boone, but there are some things that can't be said. Silvern knew, though.

"We agreed, son," he said, "a man's got to figure his dog's expendable in this business. Boone had a lot of cougar to his credit. He can't complain."

"Suppose not," I said.

With breakfast over, I got up to go. I still had winter camps to stock and it was miles to home. Silvern looked at my scratched shoulder. "Sure you can make it?" he asked.

"Sure."

"Call your dog," he said.

I called her and we started out, but after a few steps she stopped. She looked back at Silvern, sitting alone by the fire, puffing on his pipe. Then she looked up at me, whined softly, and ran back and sat down by Silvern, the white tip of her tail beating against his legs. She was smarter than I thought.

"Reckon if she was mine, I wouldn't have to call her," I said slowly, then turned and went down the trail. A good dog needs a good master, and they were two of a kind. ●

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PIG AND PERCY

By MARTIN SHAW

Percy did his duty to the public, but he never forgot that he owed something to himself too.

UNTIL the affair of Uncle Jaspar, the battle of wits between Norah and Percy was drawn. Now one scored a win, now the other, but through it all there has always run a bond of good humour and friendship.

"Percy's one of my best friends," Norah maintained. Indeed, she still does, despite his undoubted perfidy in the matter of Uncle Jaspar.

"Mrs. Allen's a real lady," Percy is wont to declare stoutly. My wife was inclined to regard this as a high compliment until I pointed out exactly what Percy's ideas of a lady probably are. Then she became more thoughtful and less apt to repeat the tribute.

Percy is our local storekeeper and postmaster, and also controller of our numerous party telephone lines. Since we live on a clay road in the heart of the New Zealand backblocks, I need scarcely point out that this makes him sole arbiter of our destinies.

When Norah married me and came to live in the country, she had to get rid of some curious city pejudices. For example, she actually cherished the belief that the telephone was an affair of automatic machines, complete privacy, and decent brevity. Ignorance so abysmal was due for a severe shock.

It came first, I fancy, when Norah was introduced to our local store and our "public servant," as Percy loves to style himself. The building itself was something of a surprise—a long, corrugated-iron shed with sagging verandah and one large window, crowded with a medley of ancient toys, bridles, babies' bottles, sweets, and goloshes. The post office is simply a matter of a counter across one end, a number of pigeon-holes behind, and an indescribable confusion of telegraph forms, air-mail stickers, old envelopes, rusty pens, and a sheet of blotting paper so well used that it wouldn't need a Sherlock Holmes to decipher most of the urgent messages sent from this post office for the last year.

Over it all presides the benign Percy, amiable and unruffled. He is a strange figure, tall and sandy-haired, with a right eye that looks at you directly and a left that roams at random round the store and his audience. It is, I may mention, the left that needs watching.

He is perhaps sixty, and succeeded — though being too young in 1914 and too old in 1939—in being a veteran of both wars. For this, much is forgiven him, particularly those lapses when he suffers from what we pleasantly call "nerves." During these spells nothing will induce him to answer the telephone, registered mail means less than the dust to him, and even "Head Office" is ignored with dreadful daring.

Nevertheless, something has to be done about it, and so one of us usually steps into the breach. Theoretically, we go down and "keep an eye" on things; actually we stamp and despatch the outgoing mail, evade the pertinent enquiries of the Government line, and lock up the whisky.

ALL this I had broken gently to Norah, and she was prepared to hail what is called "a character;" but what really surprised her was his shameless frankness. While he was talking to her, the telephone in the office kept ringing distractedly.

"That there's Mrs. Whyte. Let her ring! She got a lot of stuff from town by the last boat." With a magnificently careless gesture he removed the receiver from its hook and laid it upon the desk. Thereupon, through all his compliments to my wife, there ran the ghostly murmur of Mrs. Whyte's ring, whispering forlornly through the receiver like some scorned and unhappy ghost.

As we drove home, Norah remarked gently that, even if Percy did charge more, she thought it would pay to deal with him. I assured her that, through several years of backblocks existence, this fact had been driven forcibly home.

From that moment an unholy alliance was born between my wife and our Public Servant. Very early she developed a masterly technique in dealing with him, relying always, as I told her, on the lower side of his nature. Direct remonstrance over his many shortcomings was always useless with Percy; he merely became obtusely deaf or declared stoutly that the line was "playin' up something cruel." However, it was well known that, when leisure brought boredom, he amused himself by listening in on our conversations to each other. Norah became uncannily clever at knowing when Percy was there, and persistently played up to this foible.

"I know they're only 15/6 in town," she would say to a neighbour.

Quickly Percy would rap out the offer, "I'll let you have 'em for the same, and no freight to pay, neither."

Or again, when he delayed unconscionably with an order, my wife would say to another subscriber, secure in the knowledge that the rather heavy breathing on the line was her errant friend, "I'm simply sick of waiting for Percy. If it isn't here by the end of the week, I'll cancel the whole order." Need I say that by the end of the week the order was invariably to hand?

LONG before this, Norah had realised exactly how public our private mail can be. It came as another shock, caused by her own forgetfulness in omitting a postal note from a letter she had brought to the store.

"Oh, bother, and I've licked it up well! Percy, can you sell me an envelope?"

"No need for that. Here, 'and it over. No bother to me. I'll soon unstick that. Always have a boilin' kettle handy when the mail comes in—and all you need is a lick of my gum on the desk."

Rather dazedly, my wife "'anded it over," receiving it back graciously from the hand of our postmaster, who waved her thanks aside with the magnificent comment, "Easy as winkin'. As I say, a man in my position 'as to keep his finger on the public pulse."

At least, Norah realised, he kept it capably upon our private letters. No wonder news got about with incredible rapidity amongst the telephone subscribers. These Percy is wont to call his "'appy family"; to them he

feels as if father from them nothing is hi

Officious visitor told us that we should up with it, have h on Government regul the secrecy of the Pos and all sorts of things ount not at all in bac life. What does country's sympathy, his bi zeal, his readiness to p all night if one of appy family" should b And then there is tndly thought that pron at urgent ring: "Dog-an on the road. Told 'id had an epidemic and lost of your dogs, but all me I'd take 'alf a dozen and shut 'em up in td, if I was you." Or, a "Bloke goin' round seein' 've got our hot water tuoff and not usin' no radi Nosey Parkers, I ca — but thought you mas well know."

Need I say this utter want of principads him even closer to my s heart?

If further links needed, it is Percy's kin to Reti, our old Maori rer. Into most orders he a packet of vile tobacco, an illicit bottle of beer the "old boy."

AT the begig of this winter, unected difficulties cropped First, my ancient but hurable car yielded tempor to *anno domini* and we to seclusion in the neares rage for a long time. I meant a delay in getting our winter stores, and Nah became anxious, for has never forgotten the emn if picturesque warni of our former neighbour, Mi Regan, now mercifully rened to another district.

"Get in you stores fine an' early, Missu Sure, only three years o 'twas meself left it till th roads broke up on me, an' he packin' the goods on two oor meek little horses I had me. But 'twas the madness ame upon them when they fe the grip of the pack, and th alted on me, droppin' m groceries, and mixin' the ret up so that all the winter I was tastin' kerosene in the flor an' pickin' currants out of the tea. An' the spuds was lost on me, the sack burstin' itself an' pourin' out on the soft mud road, but up they ame in the spring in as foine a crop as iver ye saw, and me pickin' new pertateys from me own highway. But the worst sorrow was me teeth, for they'd gone from me through a hole in me jacket pocket, and meself puttin' them there to ease the sore mouth I had. Lost they were all winter, and ruined I was intoirely with indigestion an' the fowl grit that was in the cocoa an' the dried peas was in the sugar."

"How awful to lose your teeth! So expensive!" gasped Norah, struggling with her feelings and trying to sound sympathetic.

"Ah, but I found them come the spring, when the road had dried up, and the mud had loosened. There they were, grinnin' up at me, nate as you please," finished Micky, triumphantly.

"And did they bear a crop like the potatoes?" I enquired; but Mick ignored the query.

SO forcibly had the picture been imprinted on Norah's mind that, when April was half through and our car was still sitting on four boxes in the local garage, she decided to consult Percy. His reply was sympathetic and entirely insincere.

"Don't let that worry you. I'll run the stores up to your own back door in my little lorry. No trouble at all."

Norah was delighted, but her enthusiasm waned as the days dragged by and more and more gaps appeared on our larder shelves. The limit was reached when we ran out of salt, and in despair Norah complained loudly over the telephone to a neighbour.

"If Percy doesn't send me some soon, I'll cancel the whole order."

By a curious coincidence our storekeeper rang an hour later to say that Mr. Everest was on his way up, and had promised to bring a small parcel if we were out of anything. He was on horseback, but could manage if the package was light.

"Salt!" shrieked Norah frantically, and collapsed in unreasonable mirth at the success of her ruse.

Now Mr. Everest was almost a stranger. He had bought a large place beyond us, and his immaculate dress, his impeccable dignity and correct deportment rather daunted us. In fact, we were a trifle shocked at Percy's boldness.

So, it seemed, was he. When he rode up to the house rather late, it was clear at once that he didn't relish the part of delivery boy.

"The parcel appears to have burst," he remarked coldly, "but I think I have its contents intact," and proceeded to bring from every pocket countless horrid, flabby little packets. For a moment Norah gazed stonily at them, and then, I am ashamed to say, retired in bad order from the room, leaving me to cope with a situation that was frankly beyond me.

My explanation was received in chilling silence, and not, I think, believed. I couldn't altogether blame Mr. Everest, for until then I had had no idea how far six pounds of Epsom salts could travel.

IN the final battle for the winter stores, old Reti was somewhat involved. Although the road had duly broken up in April, a series of hard frosts and glittering sunshine in May made it possible for Percy to get his lorry through. Although I had made a sortie with a pack-horse and had brought the more essential goods, we were getting very short, and Norah was becoming desperate. Then one day Percy rang blandly.

"Old Johnny Puke down at the *pa's* up and died. They're havin' a big *tangi* for him, though he was never much use for anything when he was alive. Thought old Reti would like to go, and as your car's out of order, thought maybe I could kill two birds with one stone—fetch up them stores of yours and take the old boy to the *tangi*. Sort of break for him, in a manner of speaking."

Not half such a break as filling the larder would be to us, Norah said, but Percy merely retorted that that there line was gorn dead again, but if Norah was to speak up. Need I say that my wife was too incapacitated to do anything but weakly hang up the receiver and make glorious plans for the meal we should have that evening.

Reti, also, was full of joyful anticipation. By three o'clock, clad in fine raiment—you will realise that most of it was mine—he was waiting anxiously on the verandah, while Norah hung out of the

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window watching eagerly for our approaching deliverer.

She watched for two hours. Where was Percy? No reply to frantic ringing to the store. Reports from people further down the road that he had passed, chugging cheerfully in his old lorry, at about 3.30.

At five o'clock our neighbour, Mrs. Wilson rang.

"Bob's out, and I was wondering about Percy. He was taking stores up to you this afternoon, wasn't he? Well. he seems to be stuck at the foot of your road—been there for more than an hour. I've been expecting him to come up here for help, but as Bob's away perhaps you'd better go down and see."

After a scene of feverish activity, I harnessed the two draught horses in the sledge, set Reti in the middle thereof, and went down our muddy road to find out what dire trouble had overtaken Percy.

BUT our fears were groundless. Percy was in no trouble at all; on the contrary he was in a state of perfect bliss, asleep in the cab of his lorry; and around him the air was heavy with the aroma of his joy.

Wrathfully I decanted our postmaster from the lorry, roughly I bundled him on to the sledge. Telling Reti to wait, and to confine his attentions to one bottle only, I drove the snoring Percy back to the house, and tucked him up snugly in the shearers' *whare*. From afar Norah watched the proceedings, registering deep emotion the while.

"But the stores!" she wailed pitifully, as I turned the horses and proceeded down the hill once more. "Where are the stores? And I'm so hungry."

"There aren't any stores," I said, rather briefly, for I was not only hungry but angry. "There's only liquor—swags of it. If you ask me, I think Percy's made a swop."

This, indeed, proved to be the case. When I had jerked the cold lorry into reluctant life, I drove Reti to the *tangi* and heard the whole story. Percy, it seemed, had been actually in the act of delivering those mythical groceries, when he met a lorry on its way to the *tangi*, loaded to the Plimsoll mark with liquor. The temptation was too much, and a quick swop was effected—our stores for a portion of the Maoris' beer. Everyone was delighted, since for once the cellar at the *pa* was overstocked, and the larder was running low against the ceaseless incursion of more guests. Maori honour required that everyone should be fed to repletion, and for this purpose our winter's supply of cheese, bacon, biscuits, raisins and so on would prove most useful. As I said, everyone was charmed—except ourselves.

However, as always, the Maoris were eager to help and oblige. Only a portion of the groceries had been broached; all the rest were piled eagerly on to Percy's lorry, from which the casks of beer were unloaded. The rest of our goods, they told us, would be replaced from the store; they themselves would pay Percy for every pound they had used. Pay? Of course they would pay—maybe to-morrow, maybe some other day.

WE left Reti already deep in dried shark, washed down by beer, and returned to Norah, and, later, to the best meal we had eaten for a month.

Very early next morning we heard the shattering blast of Percy's engine starting; later, when we looked into the *whare*, we saw that he had folded our blankets and, like the Arabs, flitted silently away. But on the topmost blanket was pinned a note: *Glad you got the stores. Always yours to oblige, Percy.*

A week later the car was finished, and I was able to get through the mud and rescue the rest of our goods. But I believe it took Percy three months to recover from the amiable Maoris the payment for the balance of our stores which he had so generously bestowed upon the *tangi*.

Definitely, as Norah said, one up to us. Our score, she thought, was now safe — but that was before the unhappy affair of Uncle Jaspar last Christmas.

LET me say at once that Uncle Jaspar made a beautiful corpse. We had fattened him throughout the winter, killed and cured him in the late spring, and were now looking forward to keeping the Christmas festival with lashings of the best ham.

For myself, I felt that I was gazing less upon mountains of cured pork than upon those of Eldorado, for, in three years of marriage with Norah, this was the first time I had succeeded in actually killing a pig. Certainly we had fattened several, but unfortunately, after tending them with much loving care, I would one morning be reproachfully addressed by my wife: "You couldn't possibly kill dear little William," she would plead. "Why, he's just like one of the family"—and put like that, it had a murderous sound.

But when I bought Uncle Jaspar, I took certain precautions. First, there was his name. Now it happens that the one relative of mine whom Norah frankly dislikes is Great-Uncle Jaspar. Of my whole family, the old gentleman is the only one who has remained impervious to my wife's charm. "A silly scatty woman," he was reported to have said, "and most unreliable." After that, the mere christening of the pig Uncle Jaspar was enough to close Norah's heart against him.

Even so, I waited till Norah was paying an overdue visit to Great-Aunt Hester before killing Jaspar, to in this deed I was ably assisted by Reti, for, if there is one thing a Maori loves it is pork, and it was obvious to the poorest judge that Jaspar was pork personified. So he was expeditiously gathered to his fathers, and, when Norah returned, the sty was empty and the larder full—full of beautiful bacon and succulent hams, perfect symphonies in palest pink and pearly white.

At the door Reti stood grinning. "Him make the good dinner, Missus. Plenty good dinner! Eat and eat till tummy burst; plop, plop!"

Although Norah professed to be revolted, I could see that the prospect dazzled her also. Unfortunately the generous temperament of the true Celt now took possession.

"Let me see, now. One ham for darling Aunt Hester—such a treat, and think of all she gives us. And then let's throw a real party on Christmas Day—the whole district, just to show that we can have as good ham as anyone. And Reti must have his friends, too—not all of them, because that would mean every Maori in New Zealand—but enough to eat one of the shoulders."

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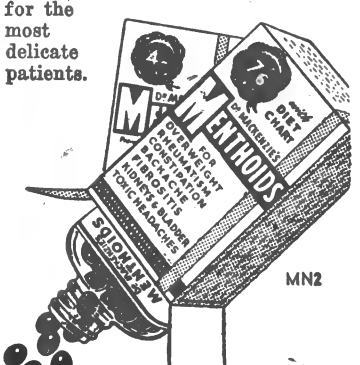

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I SHOULD have foreseen that it would happen just like that. What I did not expect was the incredible perfidy of Percy.

I suppose everyone overlooks someone near and dear when he makes his list at Christmas time. Hence those last-minute panics, those desperate sorties into the shops late on Christmas Eve. But our case was serious. We had no shops to rush to, and we had forgotten the most important person on our horizon. In short, we had unaccountably overlooked Percy.

It was sheer tragedy. Norah realised it first.

"And he's on his way up here with groceries! No time even to order something from his own shop," she cried in despair.

"I really fail to see why Percy should be given a present at Christmas, besides fleecing us all the rest of the year," I cried, with some semblance of spirit. But it was sheer pretence and we both knew it. Reti knew it too, and proclaimed it with a Maori dirge to the high heavens.

"That fellow he think he get good present. The werry good present—the lamb, or the turkey—or maybe the ham."

The words, subtly spoken, rank like a knell in my heart; but Norah was delighted. Once more her generous spirit rose to the challenge; I saw it coming and flinched.

"Why, Reti, what a splendid idea! A ham! The very thing! We still have a shoulder to spare. One for Aunt Hester, one for our party, one for your friends, and one for Percy. It looks as if it was *meant*."

Into her eyes there leapt that psychic look that I had learnt to fear.

"Whatever happens, let's be sure one of us remembers," burbled Norah excitedly. Thus was sown the seed of ultimate tragedy.

I won't pretend that I didn't suffer. The wrench was painful, for Uncle Jaspar had meant much to me, and he was being squandered to the four winds of heaven. One leg, in fact, to each wind. But there was nothing to do about it.

As soon as our postmaster arrived I could see that the Christmas spirit was already heavy in the air. His eye was wandering and slightly humid as he delivered the parcels, and the speech in which he wished us the compliments of the season would probably have lasted all night if hearty hiccoughs had not set a period to it. But the dreaded gift was there—two packets of raisins and a huge bag of highly adhesive dates. There was no escape. With aching heart I detached one of the most perfect shoulders ever cured from its place of honour, and put the gift into Percy's lorry with almost sacrificial tenderness.

He went at last, and, as I watched him steer a devious course down the hill, and heard a last hiccough of gratitude borne back upon the quiet evening breeze, I felt all the satisfaction of a man who has given of his dearest and best. I went back into the house, my face alight with the joy of giving, and met Norah in the doorway. Her face, I noticed, was alight, too.

"Dear old Percy! He was delighted with the ham," she gushed.

I started violently and in a stricken voice I asked, "Did—you—give—him—a—ham?"

"Did I . . . What? Did *you?*"

We gazed at each other silently, and then by common accord leapt like hares for the larder. It was bare. On those hooks, so proudly driven into the ceiling, hung not a single ham. Only two sides of bacon dangled starkly. That was all that remained of Uncle Jaspar!

And then Reti came in. One glance at our retainer was enough to tell that Percy's present to him had been of the liquid variety. Already the Christmas spirit had begun to work. His face was alight, too, but with more than the joy of living.

"That bloke, he werry good fellow. He bring Reti beer—plenty large beer. I say 'Take the pig. The Missus say the pig, she for you.' That bloke, he werry happy. He say pig give him good dinner, plenty good dinner."

"Well, I should think so," cried Norah, indignant for once. "Three hams ought to be enough for any bachelor!"

"And your Christmas party?" I suggested gently. Even Norah looked stricken, and I hastened to add, "Better ring everyone up and say you've decided to make it bacon and eggs instead."

And it was then, believe it or not, that the inevitable happened and my wife began to laugh. I had been dreading that moment. Tears poured from her eyes, not those blessed drops of which the poet speaks, not those that flow from a broken heart. Not the tears that any man might expect from a right-minded woman who, having asked the whole district to eat ham on Xmas Day, had found that, lo, the ham was not . . .

WHEN she had recovered, and my own homicidal tendencies were momentarily lulled, she said, "Whatever happens, this mustn't get out. We'd never hear the last of it."

Nor had we. Across our feverish plans for secrecy, the telephone bell cut shrilly. Douglas Wilson sounded quite excited.

"Look here, you people have simply got to come to us for Christmas dinner. Oh yes, I know you asked us first, but forget about your wretched little ham. I've one here that'll make you open your eyes! Perfect! Marvellous! A pork butcher's dream! Will you believe it, I got it from Percy. Yes, Percy, I said. What was that? Did you speak? Oh, I suppose there's lightning somewhere about—the line seemed positively to crackle. Yes, I was saying that Percy sold it to us about an hour ago. He was well oiled up, or he'd never have let us have it at the price. A gift, he said.

There at least the perfidious Percy had spoken the truth.

It was later that Mrs. Jenkins rang Norah with her invitation, and a glowing account of a shoulder purchased miraculously from the same source. And at ten o'clock the latest bulletin came from the *pa;* a message for Reti. Would he come to Christmas dinner? "We get the lovely bit of pig from Percy."

Next morning our postmaster rang us without a tremor in his voice, and read out a telegram from Great-Aunt Hester, in which the dear old lady thanked us ecstatically for the ham, but begged us to come and help her to eat it. So, one way and another, we had plenty of ham for Christmas. But that doesn't alter the fact, as Norah said quite viciously, that Percy had scored again—and heavily.

"One up—but plenty to go. Let him just wait," she said cheerily. ●

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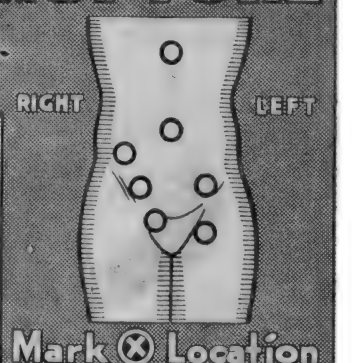

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The Passing of Congo Rudd

By C. T. Stoneham

IN the opinion of game wardens and police officers of four African territories Jack Rudd was the last of the really hard cases. As a professional poacher they estimated he made better than a thousand a year. He had been caught twice and heavily fined, but that was long ago; Jack had learnt to evade retribution. He did not use roads; he travelled with porters on unfrequented paths, bringing his loot to a point in the unknown bush near the coast where Arab and Indian merchants could come by night with lorries to remove it. He knew all the unscrupulous traders of the bazaars and did not trust any of them; it was rumoured he had killed men who sought to betray him.

This lean, bearded man, with the steely, hooded eyes, and gruff threatening voice, was an irritation to the police, who could find no pretext for his arrest. When Rudd drove his old safari car into the wilds, he vanished. Actually, he would have a rendezvous with his headman, Abdalla, a villainous Swahili, in some remote spot, and Abdalla would be shepherding a gang of released gaol-birds who were ready to earn good money by any means. A native would drive off with the car, and Rudd would take the trail at the head of his rabble, who, under his ruthless handling, soon became disciplined, willing porters.

He was a skilful, determined hunter, inured to hardship and danger; he knew as much about wild Africa as any man. Half the year he lived like a savage, the remaining months he spent in Johannesburg, or Lourenco Marques, enjoying the fleshpots. For thirty years Congo Rudd flourished unrestrained. Then he vanished and was never heard of more. This was the manner of his passing:

He was ruthless in his determination to catch up with this fabulous elephant. And at last he succeeded.

ON the edge of the Itugi country he first heard the legend of Wazi, The Father of Elephants. The Watugi were dwarf-like people who lived by hunting; nomads who sheltered in skin huts. Surrounding tribes considered them no better than animals, the Portuguese administration had been unable to tame them and they still lived tax-free and defied authority.

Congo Rudd cared nothing for all this. He was interested in Wazi, the enormous elephant whose tusks might be worth a small fortune. Abdalla revealed that Musa, one of the porters, had been married to an Itugi woman and had learned her language. Rudd sent for this man and questioned him diligently.

Wazi, said Musa, was older than any could remember. Grandfathers said he was old when they were born. He was almost white with age, half blind, and a helpless quarry if anyone had wanted to hunt him. But the Watugi held him sacred; it was believed the worst misfortune would befall the tribe if the venerable elephant were harmed. He was an immense beast, with tusks twice as long as those of the biggest herd-bull. He never left this place where he was unmolested; he roamed the mountain trails without fear and those that saw him made obeisance and removed themselves from his path. So trusting was he that the Watugi could herd him away from the dangerous borders of their land as if he had been an ox. Other elephants treated him with deference; he was acknowledged a great chief by men and beasts. "How do you know all this?" Rudd enquired suspiciously.

Musa grinned deprecatingly and disclosed that having passed this way with a safari in his youth he had got into a fight with a man, who unfortunately died, and had had to fly for his life into the Itugi Hills. The forest gypsies befriended him, he dwelt half a year among them and married one of their women.

"They make camps in the forest," he explained, "and they are always moving about. The family I was with may be a hundred miles off now."

Rudd addressed his headman. "I want to talk with some of these people."

Abdalla shook his head helplessly; they were wilder than monkeys and harder to catch. Musa stepped into the breach, saying he would make smoke-signals which would reassure the Watugi and bring them into camp. When they read the secret code they would think one of their own people was signalling.

Accordingly, that afternoon Musa built a fire on a hilltop and with the aid of damp wood and a blanket sent a pattern of smoke-puffs into the air. It was late evening before there was any reply. The camp was pitched on the banks of a slender stream, there were a dozen rude huts of branches and grass to shelter the men, and a small brown tent for their master.

Looking across the narrow glade in which his tent stood, Congo Rudd saw two diminutive figures on the edge of the forest, motionless, watching. The Watugi had come to talk.

Musa advanced towards them, his hands outstretched, palms uppermost. After some talk he returned, and behind him followed the visitors. They were little slim men, not five feet tall; they carried bows and quivers, and were dressed in half-cured skins. One, wizened as an old apple, had a tuft of wool on his chin. The other was quite young, and beardless.

Rudd had taken his seat on a box; they stopped five yards away and regarded him in silence, their small red-brown eyes expressing curiosity. Rudd thought he was probably the first white man they had seen at close quarters.

Said Musa importantly: "This is Guza, a chief, and Senga, his son. I have said you will give them food and presents."

"I want them as guides," said Rudd. "Tell them I have come to shoot elephants in their country, and that I do not love the Government. If they will be my men I will give them knives and blankets and much meat."

There ensued a long discussion, before the interpreter announced: "They will take you after elephants to-morrow. When the day is finished they will want their presents."

Rudd agreed, and, without farewell, the Watugi returned to the forest.

The following day the poacher started out, with Abdalla and Musa, the Watugi leading. The denseness of the jungle was surprising to Rudd who was not unused to rough, difficult country. Ravines were deep and rugged, choked with bush, steel hillsides were masked in thick forest, where the narrow trails of the larger beasts were all that made progress possible.

The Watugi went in silence, slipping like shadows among the trees. At brief intervals they were obliged to wait for the white man to catch up, and that annoyed Rudd, for he prided himself on his fitness. They climbed precipitous hills with the agility of goats and were undistressed when their employer laboured, gasping for air in the smothering atmosphere; they slid noiselessly in to *dongas* and disappeared among the rocks on slopes a Swiss mountaineer would have shunned.

By noon the party had travelled many difficult miles and seen no elephants. Rudd was becoming angry; he had played this sort of game before.

FROM the crest of a ridge he surveyed the country through powerful binoculars. A long way off, in a clearing on a hillside, appeared an animal the like of which he had never beheld. He made it out to be an enormous elephant. Its hide was light grey, it had immense tusks, carried low, as if their weight were too much for the aged head. It did not need Guza's guttural exclamation of dismay to assure the hunter this was Wazi, the patriarch.

The giant moved slowly and uncertainly into cover, and at once Rudd became businesslike. He was bitten by the lust for achievement; this was to be his quarry and nothing else would do. Accustomed to having his way with black people, he demanded to be led in pursuit.

Guza refused. This was a sacred beast, the guardian of the Watugi—one might more fittingly hunt one's own father. Other elephants there were; Wazi was taboo.

Rudd inspected the terrain and concluded that without knowing the paths one might spend the rest of the day in reaching the spot where the elephant had been seen. If he could find its tracks he anticipated no difficulty in coming up with it; so burdened with years, it would not move fast or far. But one could not shoot in the black night of the Itugi Hills.

It was late afternoon when they got to camp, and then the Watugi demanded their pay.

"You got me nothing," said Rudd with deceptive mildness. "Why should I pay you?"

Guza explained that they had done their best. The rains were likely to break and the elephants had moved into more open country. He offered buffalo instead; he knew where there were plenty of buffalo.

"A pair of twisters!" snarled Rudd. "Do they take me for a greenhorn?"

He made a sign. His two stalwart henchmen grabbed the Watugi and overpowered them with ease. Ropes were brought and they were trussed.

"You will lead me to Wazi," Rudd told them calmly. "When I have shot him I will give you the reward I promised.

The Watugi glared at him with fierce simian eyes and had no answer.

Rudd ordered them to be tied to trees. He took a *kiboko* of pliant rhinoceros hide and thrashed Senga until his arm was tired. The porters gathered to witness the flogging, exclaiming at its severity. But Senga made no outcry. With closed eyes and clenched teeth he endured the torment, apparently insensitive as a log.

Rudd addressed Guza. "Every evening I will do the same, until Wazi's tusks are brought to me. If you do not wish your son beaten to death you will lead me to the elephant."

The elder thrust out his chin to signify comprehension and acquiescence.

"You must let me go to find where Wazi is. Then I will take you to him."

Rudd grinned unpleasantly. "Senga will be tethered outside my tent. If you should return with men my first bullet will be fired into the body of your son. Think not to catch me off guard; I am known as Chui, The Leopard, whom no man finds asleep."

"It is well," said Musa. "He will do it. To-morrow he will come back."

That night in the starry gloom a host of little men were active in the forest. They seemed to see in the dark, they made a wide cordon, driving slowly and patiently towards a point where lava lay spread between twisted chasms.

Soon after dawn Guza appeared in the camp as if he had materialised out of air, for none saw his approach. He stood submissively before the white man. Once his gaze darted to the form of his son, crouched in the dust, but they exchanged no word.

"He has found Wazi," Musa announced. "If we start now we shall be there before noon."

Rudd left Abdalla to mind the camp. "If I do not return before midnight," he said grimly, "drive a spear through that ape there and in the morning take my trail. The father will walk in front of

(Please turn to page 71)

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The Flower in the Jungle

(Continued from page 29)

his seat and did up his safety belt. The girl, flushed with excitement, was laughing at him, quite oblivious of the necessity for doing up her own, until Oliver dived across and fastened the strap round her waist.

The trees were very close now on the port side—perhaps fifty yards off. The plane was a few hundred feet above the river bed and hugging one side of the ravine. Not a hope of getting out now and not a very wide strip of sand, stones and water between the two slopes of green. He'd better put her down soon—the rocks were getting bigger as they went on. They were flying upstream; one could tell by the little brown heaps of sticks and leaves, caught in midstream on the far side of every rock.

Suddenly a terrific shock pulsed through the fuselage, and there was silence. The engine had seized, and for a moment the plane hung, nose up and out of control, twisting into the left with the wing dropping. Quite calmly Chris found himself wondering which way it would spin before it dived into the earth.

In that instant of time the pilot put the nose down and regained a measure of control. They began a steep glide, the wind, which had seemed to stop when the engine seized, whining past them as they dropped. They were right over the river now, ten feet or so above the water. On either side of them was a steep yellow beach of sand and pebbles, too steep and too narrow for a landing. Better to drop it into the stream and trust to luck the nose wouldn't hit too big a rock. The water was shallow; at least they wouldn't drown. The nose was creeping up again now as the pilot brought them into position. Up, up it went, and Chris could see the clear water below his window getting nearer as the tail went down. A fat black rock shot past him, a foot or so below, just scraping under the wing.

And then they struck. It was like being kicked in the stomach by a particularly vicious mule. The belt dug into him, driving the breath from his lungs, and his head snapped forward on to his chest with such force that he felt a tooth snap.

There was a terrible weight on the back of his neck, and his head wouldn't lift. Then he found himself thrown over on his left side with the belt scraping down his stomach, tearing into the flesh. Just when the pain seemed unbearable, the belt parted and he was flung, head over heels, along the centre aisle. His foot struck a soft, yielding face and he heard a yelp of pain.

Then, and only then, did the sound of the crash burst through into his consciousness. It was as if someone had fired a gun next to his ear. Just that: one sharp, overwhelming burst of sound. There was a strange feeling of light — a blue-white candescence that seemed to sweep up from his feet and wrap him in a parcel of flame. It got brighter and brighter until it seemed impossible that it could go on, but it still rose about him. He was in the centre of a huge sphere of light, light that took away all time and place and feeling.

And then, quite suddenly, the light went out.

HE could have been unconscious only a moment or two, for when the light filtered back into his brain he was on the floor of the aircraft and the others were struggling to their feet around him. He was lying on his face, just behind the pilot's seat. Slowly he extended each limb; first an arm, then a leg, then the other arm, and then its leg. Somewhat to his surprise, they all worked. He raised his head.

"Heavens," said the girl, looking down at him. "You've come far. I thought you were back there?"

She smiled and bent down, offering both her hands. He struggled to his feet.

"My God—what a landing! Are you still in one piece?"

"Yes, I'm O.K. Feet wet, that's all."

The floor of the aircraft where they were standing was several inches deep in water. Chris looked at the broken nose, split vertically in half by the impact, with the water flooding in, and it was only then that he noticed the pool he'd been lying in himself. There was a pinkish stain where his grey flannel trousers

She was suddenly quite silent, and he looked up at her, and followed her gaze forward. Lying in a foot of water between the two front seats lay the pilot. He lay on his face, hands over his head, just as he'd thrown them up to protect his face during the landing. A wide crimson band ran from his head and up across the instrument panel, to end in a pale red splodge on the windscreen. Yellow-red drops of blood were still running across it, following the spines of splintered glass.

The young navigator had been sitting, stunned, staring at the figure lying in the water beside him. When Chris moved to lift it up, he came to help, and together they raised the soggy form out of the dark, blood-and-mud-stained water. Liz fished out the two parachutes and followed with them to the doorway. Just behind it, the floor of the aircraft rose alarmingly at an angle of thirty degrees, where its back had been broken. The others were making their way out into the river and McIntyre was standing up to his knees in the water helping them out the door.

"Mind yo backs!" Chris shouted. "T fellow's hurt; let's get him t first."

They han the man out to McIntyre nd Grasselli, who flounde with him to the river b where they laid him do. Liz waded across after m with a parachute in each nd, the straps trailing beh her in the water; the am was running swiftly and she had trouble keep her balance with the wat foaming past at knee lev When she reached the nk she knelt down beside man, raised his head and lipped one of the parachute acks under it. Then she star to open the other one.

"Hey, Chri Oliver was still in the a raft, huddled on the floor front of his seat. "Chris I think I've broken my leg

Chris went ck inside the machine and addled up to the front. O er's leg was twisted at a crazy angle, sticking out in the aisle. No further study s needed. He went back to he door and shouted for Li

Her face wa set and hard when she got back to the plane. She kn down in the water on the flo and slit the trouser leg up t the knee with a pair of scisso s on a key chain.

"I'll want one f your shirts, boys." The voice was thin and expressionless. Better toss for it."

"But hell, ho about the parachute silk?"

"There isn't an ."

"There *what*?"

"You heard me. Let's have a shirt."

Chris was nonplussed. "All right—but I still on't get it."

Suddenly she dropped the scissors with a little splash into the water and buried her head in her hands, sobbing convulsively.

Chris knelt down beside her. "Look here, Liz — I'm awfully sorry. Really, I didn't mean to upset you." He felt awkward and foolish, clumsy and twice his normal size.

She looked up, and the tears were streaming down her face. "That poor, poor guy!"

"What guy?" asked Oliver. "Not me I suppose?"

She buried her face in her hands again, and the words had to push their way out between her fingers.

"They've—they've gone and cut all the silk out of the 'chutes. They were full of—of paper!"

IT was true. The parachute packs had been opened, the silk cut away from the shrouds, and the packs stuffed with old newspapers. Grimly, they col-

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lected year-old copies of the "Christian Science Monitor" which the breeze had scattered along the river bank. Oliver sat at the top of the bank, his back propped against a tree and his newly-splintered leg out in front of him, folding the papers neatly, piling them, and weighting the pile with a stone. One sheet still fluttered in the breeze and McIntyre, limping slightly, was pursuing it.

The time was half-past five. Their watches, at least, registered this, but, mercifully, the sun was still quite high in the heavens; there was a lot to be done. Red Connolly had been dispatched upstream in search of a village, and Vic Grasselli was bent downstream on the same errand. Wu and Liz Kramer were starting a fire on the bank, while Chris rooted about at the edge of the jungle, tearing off bamboos for firewood. The body of the pilot lay where they'd carried it after the crash, an empty parachute pack under the head. Beside it, the navigator squatted on his heels, staring into space.

Wu spoke. "That fellow doesn't believe his pal's dead." He coughed. "Silly, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said the girl. "I hoped he wasn't dead, too—but he is. Anyway, he had a painless landing; he must have been killed the moment we hit."

Wu got up from his haunches and walked over to the body. He spoke in an undertone to the other Chinese, then squatted down beside the body. Taking the other lad's hand in his own, he ran the fingers up the dead man's forehead, through the granulated, sooty blood, and up into the cold red jelly of the hairline. As their fingers came to the blood-filled, saucer-like depression in the skull, the lad's hand snapped free and he whimpered with fright. Wu threw back his head and laughed; Liz, bent over and blowing the embryo fire, pretended not to hear.

Chris came up with an armful of bamboo just as McIntyre hobbled up with the last page of the "Christian Science Monitor."

"Ye'll no be able to feed a fire wi' yon green stuff."

"Oh." Chris dropped the pile by the fire and went back. "How about giving me a hand to get some dead stuff?"

McIntyre came up the slope and entered the jungle. "Eh—talking of dead stuff, Chris—yon bloke there."

"Yes?"

"He's no getting any better the noo, and if we dinna get him awa' it'll be—well—feerfully unpleasant."

"Yes—I suppose so. We'd better do something about burying him before dark. I'll have a word with Wu about it in a moment."

They collected a few brown tubes of bamboo and branches of other trees, and put them down beside Liz. The fire was burning well, its flame almost invisible in the fierce white light of the day, but a dark brown ghost of smoke stood up vertically for ten feet, then bowed at the waist and vanished into the wind. Across the river from them the green-gold sand sloped iridescent from the water's edge and disappeared in the lusher green of the jungle. The trees rose, layer upon layer up the side of the mountain, till distance worked them all into one vast emerald patchwork, hung against a vivid cobalt sky.

The river chattered past, green and white and misty among the boulders of its bed. Although well down its banks, it was racing past with the melted snows of Tibet at its back, forcing their way to the sea before the sky should open and monsoon water push them back across the thirsty soil.

Squarely in the middle of the river lay the aircraft, its nose pointing upstream, with a great black rock leering out of what had been the cockpit. One wing had been bitten off by another rock, and it lay, hard against the far bank, sixty or seventy yards behind the fuselage. The rear of the plane stuck up at an angle from the rest—the sting of an aluminium scorpion, poised to strike. The shape was blurred, soft and feminine, by the mist and spray from the river.

Chris and Wu took the airman's body by the shoulders and the knees and carried it downstream where the river bed twisted sharply and out of sight behind the trees. McIntyre followed them. The young navigator still squatted, buttocks to heels, half-way up the river bank, whimpering.

"Don't you speak English?" Liz asked.

He shook his head without turning in her direction.

Oliver had been silent throughout the splinting of his leg and his removal from the aircraft. He coughed now, clearing a little passage in the dryness of his throat.

"I've gone and settled things good and proper this time. How on earth am I going to get out of here? I'd have been better off if I'd had my chips like that other fellow."

He tossed a pebble into the air and caught it in his mouth. His face was pale, almost blue under the yellow hair. The girl put a log on the fire.

"Don't be silly. You couldn't have chosen a prettier place to be sick in."

"I wonder if that third 'chute was full of paper like these." He moved his leg and winced. "It might not have been."

She was silent, staring into the fire. Two monkeys, a little way off in the jungle, chuckled in the tree-tops, and she threw on another log.

The sun had fallen in the sky when Chris and McIntyre returned. It was a white hole in the blue now, a peep-hole into another world, resting on the broad green shoulder of a mountain. They said nothing, but went on into the jungle for more wood.

Grasselli came in at ten-past seven. "Not a damn thing. I wasn't going to get caught out there in the dark. I'll start off again to-morrow morning early—there must be something further down, even if it's only the sea."

The interior of the aircraft produced nothing more than a cushion or two and a map; not a sign of emergency ration—nor even a knife. Grasselli, though, had one, and Chris borrowed it and went off to find branches thin and springy enough to sleep on.

The jungle was thick and dark, but the bamboos with their light-coloured stalks were easy to find. The little ones, like overgrown clarinets, were easy to slice through with the knife. Almost naked, they sprouted little arms and fingers of leaves, and Chris collected them, trunks, arms, fingers and all.

Vines were easy to get, too; a stout pull and they untangled themselves from the trees and coiled down into his hand. Each vine seemed to pull open a little trap door in the ceiling of the jungle and let the light come tumbling in. He pulled them viciously, one after the other, till they lay piled about his feet like tame serpents.

Suddenly, there was a sharp, burning sensation between his shoulder blades. He beat at it with the back of his hand and felt something squash against his skin. In the same instant, there was another bite just above his navel. Frantically he tore off the shirt. Great red ants, an inch and more in length, were scurrying across his skin, and he swept wildly at them with his hands. One bit him below the eye, and he took to his heels through the jungle, lurching half-blind, towards the river.

It was soon obvious that he was heading in quite the wrong direction. The darkness hemmed him in on all sides; even the trap doors of light he had made for himself were gone. The pain now was almost unbearable across his back and stomach. Another ant bit his chest and he struck mechanically, feeling it squash softly across his skin.

He looked down, and in the green half-light he could see the forelegs and pincers of the ant thrashing, the rear half, like the rebellious back legs of a stage horse, squatting two inches away. He brushed it off and felt himself all over. That must have been the lot—no, there was one on his forehead. He struck at it, knocking it off before it had bitten, and bruising his eye in the process.

By kneeling and putting his head down almost to the ground he could see, like light under a door, the silver of the

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river. He got up and started to make his way in its direction. Every few seconds he had to get down and re-set course.

At last he burst out into the air. For a moment the river bank was strange; then he saw the marks in the sand and the pile of smooth stones, marking the spot where the pilot was buried. The others would be two hundred yards upstream. He tore off his shoes and trousers, and waded into the stream, walking warily; there were sudden depressions in the river bed, places where the water made whirlpools, dark and forbidding beside the green crystal of the sand in the shallows. He lay down on his stomach, facing upstream, on a sandbank, and the water, suddenly dammed by his shoulders, welled up over them and down his back. He turned his head to one side and lay flat on the sand with the icy water covering him. The pain had left him now; in its place was only the soft caress of the water on his skin.

"Where the hell did you get to?" asked Grasselli when he got back to the fire. "We had to go and get our own wood — without a knife. Good God! What's happened to your eye?"

Chris put a hand up and it was only then that he realised the eye was swollen tight shut. There was no pain, and the bathe had so invigorated him that he laughed.

"Ants—that's all."

"Come here," said Liz. "Ummm — you'd better bathe that in cold water."

He laughed again. "I have thanks. I've bathed myself from head to foot."

"Then go and lie down on the lovely bed they've made for you.'

Seven little rectangles of green were spread around the fire. Leaves and twigs had been dumped on the sand and the edges of each rectangle squared with thicker branches, pegged in position, to keep the leaves in place. Chris lay down on his; Oliver, his eyes closed, was lying on the next.

It was slowly but inexorably getting darker. The sun had dropped out of sight and the camp was now in shade; the flames licked off a shadow here and another one there, throwing hands and faces successively into the light. A jackal barked.

"Any sign of Red yet?"

"No."

THEY must all have fallen to sleep by the time he did arrive. Chris woke to find Red bending over him.

"Say, look—I've got a coupla natives here!"

Chris sat up sharply. At first he could see nothing, but as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he made out the two men squatting behind Red. Their eyes shone like coals in the reflection of the fire. One was wearing blue shorts, the other a four-inch square of cloth which hung from his waist. They both wore earrings, and big knives in cane scabbards that hung over their shoulders.

The others woke up, one by one, and the two natives chattered for a moment and went off into the jungle. Red sat down beside Chris. "I didn't get to a village, but I found these two guys on the river bank a few miles up. I beckoned 'em down here and I guess they understood. Anyway—they're here."

Oliver was awake. *"Hoi tumlog,"* he shouted. *"Humlog kidhar hai?"*

"They dinna speak Hindustani," muttered McIntyre from his pile of leaves. "Ye're no in Firpo's the night. Try them on guid old-fashioned words—preferably in a Yankee accent." He snorted and turned his back to the fire.

"What's wrong with Mac?"

"Dunno. I don't think he likes this spot very much. Who the hell does?"

"What," asked Liz, "do you think those boys are doing back there?"

As if in answer to her question, the two natives appeared with a huge green organ-pipe of bamboo, six feet long and six or seven inches in diameter. They dumped it down beside the fire and the man in blue shorts chopped it in half with his knife, making two three-foot cylinders. The other man produced his own knife and shoved it inside one of them, piercing the wood partition which separated the segments. He scraped around the inside for a moment or two and then up-ended the cylinder and let a handful of chips and splinters fall out into the fire.

The process was repeated for the other cylinder, before he picked them up and went down to the water. His partner put some more logs on the fire and it was soon roaring, the orange flames lighting up the far bank of the river.

The bamboos came back, filled with water, and Loincloth stood them up in the centre of the fire while Blueshorts dug into a cloth bag and produced a few handfuls of rice. He dumped them into one of the bamboos and retired into the jungle. Loincloth joined him, and the others could hear them chopping through the undergrowth with their knives.

"Well, I'm damned," said Grasselli. "Well, I'm damned."

The natives came back, their hands full of coarse brown roots, and tucked them away among the embers of the fire. Loincloth disappeared again and Blueshorts squatted by himself, staring into the fire. His black hair was coiled up on the top of his head, Sikh-fashion — except that there was no beard to coil up with it—and the little ball was tied with a strip of rag which fluttered up and down in the draught from the fire. His earrings were circles of wire, piercing the lobe and hung with little amber beads. Half a dozen lank black hairs hung from the outer corners of his upper lip, a Mongolian apology for a moustache. He might have been [illegible] age from twenty-five to [illegible]nty.

The water in both bamboos was boiling. [illegible]ving the one with the rice [illegible] simmer, he took the other [illegible]rom the fire, grasping it a[illegible]e the water level, where it [illegible]as still cool.

"Du wa, hka[illegible]in, yaw!"

"Eh?" puffed McIntyre, sitting up.

The man st[illegible] up and pretended to was[illegible]rst his face, then under his [illegible]ms, and then between his le[illegible]

"All right, [illegible]l right, old man," laugh[illegible]d Grasselli. "We've got it r[illegible]."

Liz giggled [illegible]nd the man swung round. The sudden movement start[illegible] her and she caught her bre[illegible]h, while the native, even [illegible]re alarmed, backed hastily [illegible]way, almost knocking over [illegible]he bamboos. Then he came [illegible]ack, slowly and cautiously, [illegible]o within a few feet and st[illegible]d hard.

A few second[illegible] was enough, and he bounded [illegible]way into the jungle to return [illegible]ith his partner. Together [illegible]ney squatted down in front o[illegible]he girl. She smiled.

"Good evening[illegible]

This time it [illegible]s Loincloth's turn to leap b[illegible]kwards and this time the b[illegible]mboo of hot water capsized [illegible]to the fire. Blueshorts lean[illegible] over and picked it up bef[illegible]e it had all spilt; he, at leas[illegible], was completely *au fait* wi[illegible] the situation. Grinning broadly, he brought the bambo[illegible] up to Liz.

"Hka shin, yaw!" he urged.

She laughed and shook her head. "Too cold, too cold." Clasping her hands across her front, she pretended to be shivering. The man, not to be outdone, stuck his hand into the water and drew it out with an expressio[illegible] of mock agony, shook it vigorously and blew on the fingers.

"O.K., O.K.—I guess I know when I'm beaten."

She grinned and cupped her hands in front of her body and the native gently poured a little stream of hot water into them. With a great show of enthusiasm she washed her face and neck and smoothed the short golden hair back with her hands. He passed on to the next customer.

Loincloth had armed himself with a dozen immense leaves, each a foot or so across. These he now spread out on the ground. When the rice had simmered a few more minutes, he lifted the bamboo from the fire and let the water dribble out, holding a leaf against the open end to keep in the rice. Then he emptied a big heap of rice on to each of nine leaves. Taking some wafer-thin strips of bamboo from his cloth bag, he bundled

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up the rice into nine separate packets and tied them up. These he now handed out all round, before sitting back on his haunches and opening his own.

The rice was good. Firm and white, the grains clung together in a moist, steamy ball from which it was easy to prise off sections in the fingers. When they had all opened their packets, Blueshorts came round with segments of the root they'd put among the embers of the fire. Chopped into small pieces with his knife, they looked like dirty potato chips. By way of example he put one in his mouth, chewed it a few times and gulped. It was gone, and the others, re-assured, tried theirs.

"You know," said Oliver, "this is just like baked potato. I've got a feeling I'm going to enjoy my stay. Does anybody have any idea where we are?"

The navigator was summoned, but on being confronted with his map and an interrogative Michael Wu, burst into tears. Wu shrugged his shoulders and handed the map over to Chris. Half a pound of rice and a few ersatz potato chips in every belly had appreciably cheered the gathering, and no one seemed to care particularly where they were.

After a moment, Chris put the map away from him. The river had twisted so sharply and so often that their present position was anybody's guess. It might have been on any one of a dozen tributaries to each of four major rivers. The country had the angularity, the sharp outlines and the vivid green of Kweiyang, but the chances were that they'd come a hundred miles or more from the plateau.

"I've no idea where we are. We'll get something organised in the morning with our friends here. It can't be very far to a town."

"Perhaps!" he added to himself. Distance, after all, was relative: an hour in the air over this country; a week, perhaps, or a month, on the ground. Somehow it didn't seem to matter very much. He was strangely content.

THE two natives curled up beside the fire and the entire party was soon asleep. At intervals Chris woke to see the fire glowing softly in the darkness, a fire that never seemed to go out. Perhaps Blueshorts or Loincloth woke up from time to time and fed it.

The damp chill of the hour before dawn woke most of them up and their efforts to get warm aroused the others. Dawn crept up behind them to find the camp a hive of activity. Loincloth and Blueshorts were chopping, if the noise were any indication, most of the jungle away, water was boiling briskly in the bamboos while Wu and McIntyre fed the fire, and the rest of them were squatting at the water's edge, washing. A dense white mist had floated down with the river and lay about them, so thick that those at the water's edge were blurred outlines to those at the fire, ten yards away, and the aircraft was hidden completely.

Blueshorts popped out of the jungle and went up to Oliver. Carefully, and with a piece of stick, he measured the length from head to toe and retired: a little while later both natives emerged with the framework of a stretcher. The two long sidepieces were saplings, and these were joined by eight or nine crosspieces of bamboo.

Oliver watched, enthralled, as Loincloth placed a six-inch thick cylinder of bamboo on the ground and chopped into it, lengthwise, with his knife. With his left hand he rotated the cylinder a degree or two after each stroke. After one complete revolution he picked it up and reversed it, with the end he'd been chopping placed nearest to him. After a few more strokes he picked it up by both ends, stood up and shook it. The cylinder unrolled like a length of linoleum, yellow on one side and green on the other, and he triumphantly spread it out over the crosspieces of the stretcher. Blueshorts then bound the edges with more of his bamboo string, and the stretcher was ready for action.

They set off upstream after having breakfasted on rice and splashed through a conducted tour of the aircraft for the natives. The navigator, still dumbly anonymous, had brightened perceptibly during the night and now cheerfully shouldered one of the four handles of the stretcher. They started off with the four Asiatics — navigator, Wu, Loincloth and Blueshorts—all somewhat the same size, each lending a shoulder. The relief team of Chris, McIntyre, Red and Grasselli, walked slowly at the rear with the girl. Oliver moved majestically, feet first, in solemn procession along the river bank.

The sun climbed steadily in the sky and the sweat poured off their bodies, drenching their clothes. Every ten minutes or so the teams would change, man by man and corner by corner, rather than put the stretcher down on the ground and be faced with the exertion of raising it to shoulder-level again. Apart from a joke or two, Oliver remained quietly stoical throughout the convolutions of his bed. When Chris relieved Blueshorts at one corner the thing tilted alarmingly and he only just remained aboard by throwing both arms over the upper side like a man climbing out of the water on to a raft.

After an hour's march they stopped for a rest. Blueshorts dashed into the jungle again and came out a minute later with two freshly-cut bamboo cups. He filled them both from the river and handed one to Oliver and the other to Liz.

They all drank in turn and the water trickled into their bodies, filling the arid, thirsty corners. No one spoke, and after a minute or two they set off again. Progress was slower now, as their bodies were tired and their shoulders bruised by the weight of the stretcher.

"Don't look now," said Chris, sliding the pole into another, less painful spot against his neck, "but I think we've got a hill to climb—and it looks like a hell of a steep one, from here. Hey, look out what you're doing!"

McIntyre had slipped the pole off his shoulder and brought it down to waist level. The others scrambled out from under their corners and lowered the stretcher to the ground, with Oliver clinging hopefully to it.

"By God—I'll not go anither foot wi' this damn sedan chair!"

They watched, too tired for amazement, as he stormed off.

"Perhaps I could manage a corner?" offered Liz, after a bit. "How about it?"

Speechless with exhaustion, the others lay down on the sand. Loincloth and Blueshorts squatted and stared.

"No," said Chris eventually. "You couldn't manage a corner

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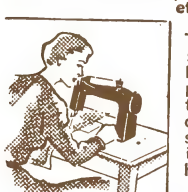

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of it—the gentleman is very heavy. We'll be all right, even if Mac doesn't change his mind. We can all change places one by one, instead of having two teams."

"To hell with it." Oliver rolled out on to the sand. "I'm going to walk. It can't be awfully far to wherever these chaps are taking us, and if they can whip up a pair of bamboo crutches or something I'll get along fine."

"Nothing doing, sonny boy." Liz was emphatic. "You get carried or you stay here."

The others looked on unhappily, with the sun stabbing down at their eyeballs. Finally Blueshorts rose, with dignity, to his full five feet. "*Nang de hkring mu*," he announced solemnly, adjusting the scabbard of his knife. "*An lahkawng hto hum de masha ni ʒa la na, yaw.*" One hand stiffly adjured them to stay still, and the other pointed up into the jungle where a path ducked up from the beach.

Everyone understood, and there was a heartfelt murmur of relief when the two of them disappeared into the green.

McIntyre had walked on out of sight, beyond where the path left the beach.

"Better call him," someone suggested. "He may get lost if we nip up this path and he's still wandering up the river."

"To hell with him," said Grasselli. "If he's so dumb he can't tell we're not following him, he deserves to get lost."

They lit cigarettes and lay back on the sand, puffing contentedly at the sky. The sun had climbed to a point very nearly above them. Chris dangled his key chain and the shadow fell in a little heap on the sand directly below it. The pendulum motion, when he swung it, was reflected in miniature as a stubby black pencil of shadow.

There was a pleasant breeze from the river. The mist had cleared and the far bank was clearly visible, only forty or fifty yards across the water. The river here was narrower than at their camp site—narrower and deeper. There were sizable fish in the pools at the water's edge, fish like young salmon, twisting four or five feet below the surface, the harsh white light reaching down to touch them as they swam between the rocks.

Up to this point there had been anything between ten and twenty feet of sand and stones separating the jungle from the river itself. It had gradually been diminishing, and at this point it virtually ended. Dense scrub came down the bank and the trees overhung the water, mirrored coolly in its surface. This, then, was the reason the path left the bank and swung into the jungle. McIntyre would have a job following the river.

Chris lay, limp and relaxed, on the sand. The sweat from his body was drying, leaving little areas of cold, dry skin which felt strangely foreign to the rest of him. His face was dry now, and he wrinkled, then stretched it, like a rubber mask, until it fitted again. The fingers of each hand stuck gummily together and he held them over his face. Silhouetted against the sky, they were only a pair of shapeless black mittens, and he rolled over on his side to see them in the light.

Slowly he spread the ten fingers out like a fan. There was a thick ridge of dirt along the edge of each one, and the lines across his palms were etched in black. They were an imposing collection of lifelines, lovelines and headlines, a palmist's nightmare in mud. He hadn't noticed the jagged three-inch gash in his arm just above the wrist. A souvenir of the crash.

Just then, McIntyre appeared from around the corner. His hair and moustache had been neatly damped and combed, and his face wore the bland, unconcerned expression of a man arriving on time for an appointment. Casually, he sauntered into their midst and sat down. No one appeared to pay any attention; but the silence which had been sitting happily with them, turned and gripped them all a little closer.

Someone started to whistle, nervously, tunelessly and obviously. The silence had, with his return, become a strained, embarrassed hush, something to be broken. Their faces, relaxed and happy a moment ago, had hardened imperceptibly into subtle caricatures of the expressions they'd been wearing. Even the girl looked older. McIntyre, the impetus of his entry gone, was patently ill at ease. He stared, unseeing, at the far bank of the river, one hand swatting nervously at the ends of his moustache, the other gripping a handful of pebbles, with the knuckles, drained of blood, showing white through the skin.

AFTER Blueshorts and Loincloth had returned with half a dozen other villagers, their progress was swifter. The stretcher bobbed along in front of them on six fresh pairs of shoulders; Blueshorts followed it, and the others came at intervals of five or six feet, in single file, with Loincloth bringing up the rear. The jungle was dense, unbelievably so, but the path along which they were moving was well worn and a yard or so wide. With luck and some skill one could avoid coming in contact with the undergrowth.

Grasselli was the first to discover leeches, and when they looked down at their legs it was to find themselves spattered with them. At every point where their bodies or their clothes made contact with the jungle, the little parasites had clambered on; soft, black blobs of hunger, they dug their invisible teeth into the flesh and locked themselves in place.

The barefooted natives got an even bigger share; every so often, one of the stretcher-bearers would grunt and the procession would halt while he raised first one leg, then the other, and plucked twenty or thirty leeches off with his free hand. Every leech left a scar, and their legs from the knee down were striped like seaside candy with streams of blood which oozed thickly down the skin.

Chris, plodding wearily behind Blueshorts, noted, with a little quickening of interest, that the man had a cane band around each leg just below the knee. He resolved to investigate at the next halt, and promptly fell flat on his face in the mud. Grasselli came up behind him and offered a hand as he struggled to his feet, but was too tired to comment. They were climbing a steep hill, and the path, treacherous with mud, zigzagged from side to side, fifty yards one way then forty another, like a topical slalom, uphill.

Every now and then they passed under an opening in the jungle. Thirty or forty feet above their heads the aperture let through a golden pillar of sunlight, startling in its contrast to the green-black opacity. In one of them a little blue hummingbird hovered, like a bird in a cathedral. Green parrots darted through the light, like moths in the beam of a cinema projector; and, swinging invisibly through the darkness, keeping pace with the men, were monkeys, shrieking at them from both sides of the path. Everything was soaking wet. Although the monsoon had not started, the spasmodic showers of the cold season had kept the jungle moist, and the sun, permanently forbidden entry to most of it, served merely to keep the atmosphere steaming.

They stopped at what proved to be half-way mark in the climb: it was three o'clock in the afternoon and they'd been climbing for half an hour. A flat white rock, set like an enormous opal in the side of the hill, occupied an area thirty feet square, and by its presence in the earth cleared a corresponding piece of sky from jungle.

The slope was steep and the cleared area extended down the hill a little way, exposing not only sky but a breath-taking view of the hills around them. They must have climbed a thousand feet from the river bed. The far bank of it was just visible at the foot of the hill. Across it rose a densely wooded slope, the top of it level with their present position. Behind it rose mountains of increasing size, purple and green in the afternoon haze, with here and there a patch of lighter green where a little square of jungle had been hacked down to make way for cultivation.

One by one they reached the rock and lay down upon it. The stretcher was left on the path. At this point the slope was so steep that Oliver, lying on it with his feet pointing downhill, looked almost as if he were standing up.

Once again they hardly spoke, contenting themselves with a glance round to see how the others were making out in the climb. Oliver, painfully conscious that without the stretcher they'd probably have reached whatever destination they were making for,

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The Passing of Congo Rudd

studied them with dismay. All of them, stretcher-bearers, guides and airmen, were exhausted. The stretcher-bearers were drenched in sweat, their few clothes clinging pathetically to their dripping bodies, and their hair, cut straight all round their heads, clotted into wet black ropes about their skulls.

The girl lay, pale under the sunburnt skin, her khaki shirt black with sweat. The others had taken off their shirts to bind them round their heads or hang them from their waists.

The silence was broken as Grasselli quite suddenly shot to his feet and pushed his way into the jungle. He blundered heavily on, like an elephant, for a few yards; then they heard him retching for a full minute. He reappeared, sheepish but cheerful.

"Sorry about that. Just couldn't help it, but I feel better now."

Chris had his shirt, minus a tail which was binding up Oliver's splint, wound round his middle, and when he sat down, something in the breast pocket jabbed him in the base of the ribs. It was a little blue diary-cum-engagement book, and the colour had soaked through on to his skin. Pulling it out of the pocket, he thumbed idly through the sodden pages. *April 16, R. Singh, Dum Dum 9 a.m.* Mentally he ticked off the days since the eventful rendezvous. 17th Finjan, 18th Kweiyang, 19th crash, 20th half-way up hill in parts unknown. *21st*, said the book, *bridge with Van Aachens.*

He laughed out loud, and threw it into space through the hole in the trees. The wind turned it over and flicked it away out of sight.

THE river was low, lower than at any time since the last rainy season. The little canoe, burnt out of a tree trunk, had not far to travel from one bank to the other. The water though, was rapid —rapid as the barking deer in flight, rapid as the plunging hawk. The two men paddled vigorously with short clipped strokes, and the canoe slipped two yards downstream for every yard of progress they made across it. One of the men stopped to hit the raised head of a water snake and they floated faster with the current while his companion swore at him from the stern.

END OF PART 2.

Part 3 will appear next month.

(Continued from page 65)

my rifle and I'll take care of him."

Musa translated this for Guza's benefit. The Watugi chief bowed his head in subjection.

They set out at once, the guide a few paces in advance, Rudd following, finger on trigger, with Musa last, carrying a second rifle and a bush knife. The forest closed them in.

RUDD became aware of stealthy movement all about him. Men, unseen, furtive as rodents, were creeping through grove and thicket, keeping the strangers under surveillance. Suddenly a short, slender arrow thudded into the bole of a tree. Rudd knew it was poisoned. He wheeled, with rifle raised, but there was nothing to shoot at.

Mile after mile they followed the shining back of their gnome-like guide. He moved at a sliding walk, without sound, without pause, his darting gaze observant of things the others did not suspect. Rudd was practised in the bush, but he realised that this native must understand his surroundings like the animals themselves.

He was now confident this would prove a successful venture. That night he would be in possession of several hundred pounds' worth of ivory and be victor over the king of elephants.

They emerged on to a plateau. Hill and forest were behind; this place was scored by enormous gullies and ridges of tumbled granite; vegetation could not live here. The ground was hard underfoot, showing no spoor.

Guza looked keenly about him, sniffing the air like a dog. Then he plunged into the mouth of a ravine, which grew deeper and narrower as they advanced. Presently they walked as in a trough, using a faint trail among boulders fallen from the steep hillsides. Rudd thought he caught a glimpse of two little figures similar to his guide, vanishing behind the rocks. But his attention was diverted by Guza's speaking.

"Wazi is here," he said unemotionally. "Go forward and you will see him. There is no way out of this place. He cannot escape."

Rudd examined his rifle, feeling the thrill of the hunter stir his nerves. "Keep watch on this animal," he told Musa, jerking his head contemptuously at the guide. Then he took the lead while his servant gripped his bush knife and motioned Guza forward.

Rudd trod cautiously over stony ground to a cleft in the rocks. He thought it was like the entrance to some ruined cathedral, a great smooth portal towering up. He heard a tinkle of water from an unseen stream tumbling down the cliff. Just as he rounded the buttress Guza gave a long, piercing whistle.

Rudd paused, aghast. In a small, almost circular amphitheatre, ringed by unscaleable cliffs, stood the beast he sought; a huge gaunt figure, with sagging grey hide and long, shining tusks. It stared myopically at him, warned by that whistle that man was near. But Rudd had no time for more than a glance at the coveted trophy, for to one side stood a great bull elephant in the prime of life, and behind it, rank on rank, the herd of titans it ruled.

The hunter's gaze swept that phalanx, half a hundred cows and bulls, all fiercely alarmed, as wicked a herd as even nightmare could have shown him. They had his wind, their heads and trunks were up; they knew themselves trapped in this place and that only one means of escape was possible. Rudd's experience of these beasts warned him to expect a mad stampede, through the gap, along the narrow cluttered defile, and out to the open plateau. There was no hope of stopping that charge.

Behind him Guza said calmly: "There is Wazi, Father of Elephants, white man, and he has many of his children about him."

He slipped like an eel past the terrified Musa, who made no attempt to stop him. For at that moment the mob of elephants surged forward in an irresistible rush to escape from the cul-de-sac in which they had been caught. As Guza dived into a crevice between big rocks and lay flat, he heard the futile reports of the hunter's rifle, the thunder that followed.

At dusk, while Abdalla sat guarding the prisoner in front of the tent, a thrown club whirled out of a bush and struck him on the back of the head. Without a sound the headman collapsed and lay face-down in the grass.

Guza came creeping like a snake over the flat ground. Quickly he cut Senga's bonds; together they stole away to the forest.

"Is it well with you, my son?" asked the father softly.

"It is well," was the reply, in a weak voice. "But is it well with the Old One?"

Guza hissed affirmatively. "He flourishes in the midst of his kin. All night we herded them, so quietly that they were not afraid. At last we drove them into the chasm that has no outlet. I guided the white man there; Kurgi's people let us pass. I kept faith with that man. I led him to Wazi."

He chuckled wickedly. "He was most anxious to reach the Old One, my son, but I think he was more anxious to depart."

Next morning Rudd's camp was deserted. Abdalla and the porters were making their way out of that country as fast as they could travel. Neither did they see fit to report the disappearance of Congo Rudd, the notorious poacher. His fate remained a mystery. ●

A WARNING TO MEN IN MID-LIFE

At about 50 years of age most men show a marked decline in vitality and vigor. At the same time, and for no apparent reason, they suddenly develop a nervous tension and emotional instability; they are unable to sleep, and lose interest in life; they suffer from joint pains; become irritable over nothing, easy to aggravate, moody, indecisive, unable to concentrate, and over all there's constant dragging tiredness.

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Wheels Down and Locked

By BERNARD HARRIS

McKechnie may not have been the best pilot in the R.A.A.F., but he had something more than skill—luck!

EVEN during the war, the R.A.A.F. chose its pilots carefully. It filled its initial Training Schools with specially selected personnel, from the cream of which is chose about one-fifth. That did not mean that every pilot was a paragon of virtue. Some pilots were light-headed; some were loose; some were lazy; but, until I met McKechnie, I never knew a pilot who could not handle a plane.

I shall always remember the day he came wandering mournfully among us, a tall, stooped Scotch-Australian with undeveloped limbs and a hollow chest. He was in his middle twenties, but his chronically incorrect posture, his seedy-looking Scotch hair, a perpetually struggling sandy moustache and the miserable expression he always wore made him look much older. He had pinched, dour features clouded over by a mournful expression which made him look sad even when he smiled; and he spoke with a slight burr always seemingly accompanied by a dismal background wailing like the cry of a sick curlew. He had some of the Scotch wit, but it was delivered with such obvious sorrow that it would make you cry. He kept himself scrupulously covered against the sun so that, where he was not painted with various tinctures, he was as white as a lily, even on the face and hands.

Perhaps McKechnie had not always appeared so, for when I knew him he had some reason for being miserable, for he had dermatitis in several painfully acute and persistent forms, and the medical section, apparently a bit hazy about what to do for skin cases, painted him a different colour every day, until the question whether he would turn up a dark purple, a brilliant orange, a light tan or a gay green, almost rivalled in popularity the vagaries of the weather, as a breakfast-table topic.

In addition, McKechnie had the entire medical staff in a dilemma, for one of his rashes needed to be kept dry and the other moist, so that, if the first were wetted and the second not, he would probably go completely bad and have to be shot. As the rashes were mingling together in the same spots, they compromised by sprinkling him with something he described as dry ginger ale before they painted him up. I believe some natives, who liked on occasions to daub themselves, particularly their hair, with clay, spotted McKechnie in a maroon-motifed decor one day, and followed him about waiting for him to lead them to where he made-up.

In addition, McKechnie was the worst Beaufort pilot in the whole R.A.A.F. From my own experience as a back-seat driver, I believe a Beaufort, with its steep approach; its tendency, even so, to float; and its trying habit, on the slightest pretext, of hopping along like some giant kangaroo, was very difficult to put down to a smooth three-point landing. Most pilots, however, made a reasonable job of it, but McKechnie always brought down a Beaufort in what could only be described as a controlled prang, so much so that navigators jostled each other in frantic attempts not to fly with him, while every time he arrived in a circuit area, the whole station held its breath and the ambulance and fire crews jumped to action stations.

I believe I was with him the only time he ever landed a Beaufort without almost bumping the undercarriage up through the mainplane, and then the aircraft's behaviour seemed so unusual to him that when he taxied in, he U/S'd her for low hydraulic pressure in the legs.

The steep approach always led him to check anywhere but at the correct height, but strangely enough no damage was ever sheeted home to his landing inability.

But landing was by no means McKechnie's only aeronautical weakness. He always wallowed all over the strip in his take-off run and never seemed to let his aircraft take off herself, but pulled her off too soon, so that invariably she made as if to plunge to earth again, giving her occupants the fright of their lives. Besides, he seemed to lack the indispensable finesse of touch, and jerked the stick about as one might swing the wheel of a traction engine, so that his aircraft never seemed to climb but jump, to descend but dive, to turn but stop dead in its track and reverse direction. Every G you experienced in his plane was a capital G.

I often wondered whether his dermatitis and his general run-down condition had affected his nerves or his eyesight; and I shall never forget the day when I spent many minutes fervently hoping they hadn't.

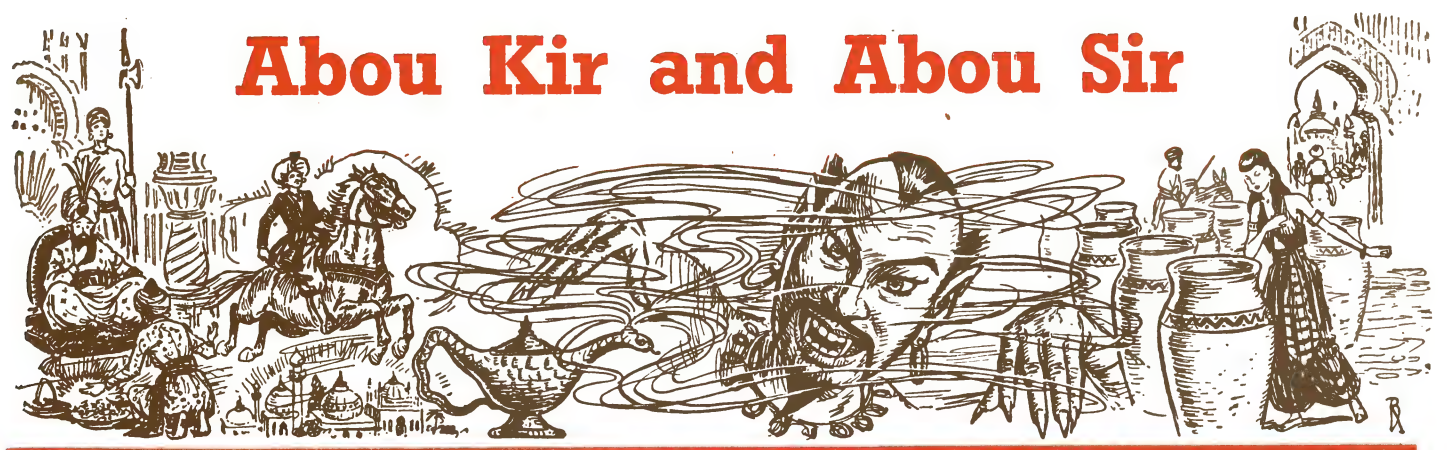
PETER ROWE, the current ops. officer, spent one whole afternoon tactfully canvassing for a wireless-navigator to accompany McKechnie on a courier run to Munda next morning; but finally, knowing that I was old and wouldn't be greatly missed and that I wouldn't argue anyway, he put my name down. We carried down two A.I.F. troops and fresh meat, fresh butter and fresh vegetables for a small Yank unit still stationed at Munda. My mouth watered all the way down, for I knew that those hospitable Yanks would serve us up for lunch great slabs of the T-bone steak we brought them and a couple of fried eggs each. In fact, I was so absorbed in my reflections that I scarcely noticed that, as we turned in to the circuit area, ambulances and fire-tenders were hurriedly moving into markedly conspicuous positions and that a band of morbid sightseers was hastening to line the strip and see the fun.

Everybody at Munda knew McKechnie and fully expected him to excel himself sooner or later. When he let down his undercarriage on the cross-wind leg he seemed, as usual, to lose temporary control of his aircraft so that she almost turned on her back, then, as he straightened up to run in and lowered his flaps, her nose dropped as if she would bore straight in like a dive-

(Please turn to page 78)

The AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL JUNIOR MAGAZINE

Abou Kir and Abou Sir



RETOLD FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS BY R. G. CAMPBELL

MANY a long century ago, there stood next door to each other in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, a barber's shop and a dyer's shop. The barber, whose name was Abou Kir, and the dyer, who was called Abou Sir, were friends, although they were entirely different types of men. The barber was a very honest fellow and so good-hearted that he did not realise that the dyer was the exact reverse; Abou Sir was, in fact, a clever and lazy rascal, who did as little as he possibly could, and charged exorbitant prices for his work. This would have been bad enough, but Abou Sir was not content with the money he made in this fashion; he robbed his customers outright, also.

Whenever an unsuspicious looking person brought him a piece of cloth or a garment to be dyed, he would demand payment in advance, on the pretext of having to purchase dyes. Having received the money, he would immediately spend it, and, then likely as not, sell the cloth and spend the money he received for it.

When the customer returned for the finished work he would continually be put off with some flimsy excuse, Abou Sir saying that he had been sick or busy. Finally the customer either lost patience and did not come again, or else demanded his cloth back. When this happened, Abou Sir would explain that he had really finished the job, but that the cloth had been stolen by some scoundrel while it was hanging in his yard to dry.

Naturally, this did not please his customers, who would demand their money back, whereupon Abou Sir, laughing up his sleeve all the while, would implore their pardon, and tell them that he was only a poor man, who, if he returned their money, would be utterly ruined.

As no one wished to ruin an apparently honest tradesman, this was generally sufficient, but rumours spread through the city about him, and, as might have been expected, the only people who ever went to his shop were strangers, who did not know his reputation.

One day a nobleman from Persia left him a great quantity of valuable silk to be dyed, and, in accordance with his request, advanced him the price of the work. Abou Sir promptly sold the material, and whenever the Persian appeared, the scoundrel would make himself scarce, generally taking refuge in the barber's shop next door. The Persian, however, was not to be gulled in this manner. He set a watch on the shop, caught Abou Sir, and when his cloth was not forthcoming,

In 1798, Lord Nelson caught the French Fleet in a bay at the mouth of the Nile, and by defeating them in a terrific battle, prevented Napoleon from taking his army into India. This story explains how the bay in which the battle was fought gained its name.

flew into a passion and sent for the police, who at once locked up the shop, took away the key, and told the dishonest proprietor that the magistrate would enquire into his doings.

IN a panic, Abou Sir sought the advice of the barber, though without telling him of his thieving practices, but claiming to be an entirely innocent man. Abou Kir himself was not having a very good time, for his trade had slumped, and, as it happened he was on the point of leaving Egypt in a ship bound for Cyrenaica. He suggested that Abou Sir come with him, and that wherever they went, they follow their respective trades and share the proceeds equally between them.

This suited Abou Sir, who could not get on board fast enough, but as soon as the vessel sailed, he complained of seasickness, and rolling himself in his blankets, refused to stir.

The kindhearted Abou Kir not only waited on him throughout the voyage, but shared with him the money he received for shaving the sailors. When at last the ship reached Benghazi, the pair went ashore and took a room in a house, where Abou Sir at once went to bed, on the pretext that he still felt very ill, leaving his unsuspecting friend to go about the city looking for work.

In those days, it was the custom for wealthy men to engage barbers to call on them. Abou Kir managed to get enough customers of this kind to keep him going while he invariably shared the money he received with his companion, in strict accordance with their agreement.

Not only did he do that, but he also cooked for them both and waited on Abou Sir as if he had been his servant. All this was such a strain that finally Abou Kir fell really ill himself, whereupon his rascally comrade, thinking that there was nothing more to be gained from him, stole the money that was in his pockets and left him there.

WHILE sightseeing in the streets of the city, Abou Sir made an interesting discovery. It seemed that the trade of dyeing was not very advanced in Benghazi—in fact, no one in the place knew how to dye any other colour except blue. Now, before he took to his dishonest ways, Abou Sir had been a very clever tradesman, and saw that here was a big opportunity for a man, who, like himself, could make dyes in any required colour.

Accordingly, he went to the most prosperous-looking dyeing establishment in

the city, and offered his services, but the proprietor refused him.

"We do not," he explained, "permit any stranger to enter our craft."

"In that case," said Abou Sir, "I shall open a shop of my own."

The Benghazi dyer laughed at him.

"You will not find that so easy," he said. "Foreigners are not allowed to open shops in Benghazi. We keep everything to ourselves here."

Not to be beaten, Abou Sir then sought an interview with the king.

"It seems, O king," he said, "that the dyers of this city are mere ignorant beginners at the art, for they can produce only blue, so that cloths of all other colours must be imported. But I can make and use dyes of any known shade, from jet black to palest lemon, and I would immediately open a shop but for the jealousy of the local dyers, who will not permit any foreigner to open a business, in case his superior skill brings them into ridicule."

The king was sufficiently interested to advance him money to open a dyeworks, and no sooner was Abou Sir ready to start, than the monarch became his first customer. So good were the results that Abou Sir shortly became famous in the city and began to have a great deal of money. This suited him very well, for it enabled him to stop working himself and to employ slaves for the purpose.

MEANWHILE the landlord had found the unfortunate Abou Kir lying unconscious. This kind-hearted individual nursed him back to health, by which time he had discovered the treachery of his so-called friend. It was a good many weeks before he was able to go out, and when he did one of the first things he saw was Abou Sir's shop with its display of variously coloured material, which excited great interest among the people.

It was obvious that Abou Sir had suddenly become a very prosperous man, which delighted the simple soul of the barber, who was always ready to think the best of everyone, even including a man who had deceived and deserted him. He imagined that he had only to remind Abou Sir of their compact to receive his half of the profits of the business, according to their arrangement.

But Abou Sir, it will scarcely surprise you to learn, had entirely different ideas. Indeed, as soon as his former friend entered he roared out:

"Begone, you scoundrel! How often must I tell you not to hang about my establishment, wasting my time. Throw him into the street!"

Half a dozen slaves immediately obeyed, while Abou Sir stood at the door of his shop and loudly informed the passers-by that Abou Kir was a thief who loitered about awaiting the opportunity to steal something. Having no means of proving anything against Abou Sir, the barber was forced to slink away.

As he walked about the town in, you may be sure, a very melancholy mood, he noticed that there did not seem to be a Hammam, or as it is called nowadays, a Turkish bath, in all the city of Benghazi.

The Hammam was a great feature of life in the East, for in it a patron could not only get baths of every temperature from scalding hot to icy cold, but also steam baths and perfumed baths, while expert masseurs were always in attendance, as well as barbers and persons to serve food and drink, particularly coffee. In fact, a visit to a Hammam was a very important function, occupying several hours, while it was also of great benefit to the health of the customer who went through the whole routine. Indeed, there are Turkish baths in almost all big cities to-day, even in Australia.

It was no wonder, therefore, that Abou Kir was surprised to find Benghazi unprovided with this necessity. He lost no time, then, in seeking an interview with the king, to whom he explained at great length the advantages of the Hammam, pointing out that in other parts of the world no king thought himself worthy of the name unless he enjoyed a visit to the baths at least once a week.

Abou Kir further explained that he himself knew all about conducting a Hammam, as in his youth he had worked in one as a barber. He painted the whole thing in such glowing colours that the enterprising monarch immediately advanced him enough money out of his treasury to have a Hammam erected, and could scarcely wait until it was finished before he tried it. So marvellously refreshing did he find it that he gave Abou Kir a rich reward. Now, of course, everyone in Benghazi hastened to patronise the wonderful new baths, and Abou Sir, to the amazement of his former comrade, came to the Hammam amongst the crowd as if nothing had ever happened.

"This is most astonishing," he said. "Where have you been all this time? Here have I been searching the city for you, thinking that some evil had befallen you. Why did you not let me know that you were still in Benghazi?"

"Let you know!" cried Abou Kir. "That is a fine thing to say, when you know perfectly well that you had me turned out of your shop."

"What is this I hear?" retorted Abou Sir, with a great show of amazement. "I have not seen you for many months. There was, indeed, a fellow who looked rather like you who trespassed in my shop one day, but I thought he was some thief off the streets."

THIS, you may well suppose, did not go down very well with Abou Kir, but he was a forgiving man, and thought that, as he was doing so well out of the Hammam, he could afford to let bygones be bygones. So he replied:

"We shall say no more about that. Enter and bath at your leisure."

This Abou Sir did, but he was consumed by jealous hatred, and his wicked brain was already seeking some means of contriving Abou Kir's downfall. By the time he came out of the bath he thought he could see a way. He reminded Abou Kir about a certain ointment or cream which was used in the Hammam at Alexandria and elsewhere, and was very useful for keeping the skin cool.

"It is the one thing I find missing," he said. "Everything else is perfect."

Abou Kir admitted that he had forgotten all about that particular cream, but as he knew the ingredients, would immediately prepare some ready for the king's visit the following day.

No sooner was Abou Sir out of the Hammam than he went straight to the king's palace. The kings of those days were singularly suspicious men, always afraid, and not without reason, that they would meet a violent death at the hands of someone anxious to take the throne from them. The King of Benghazi was no exception. He lent an attentive ear to the treacherous Abou Sir's story, which was that, not content with being the proprietor of a successful Hammam, Abou Kir aspired to be a monarch and in order to achieve his purpose was quite prepared to murder the king.

"The man is an accomplished villain, sire," said Abou Sir, earnestly. "I heard much about him when he was a barber in Alexandria and I a dyer there. He murdered his victims in his shop by smearing their faces, after he had shaven them, with a poisonous but sweet-smelling cream. Several days elapse before the poison takes effect, so that it is very difficult to tell what they died of. I am sure that is what he intends to do to you. On no account allow him to touch your royal skin with anything of the kind."

It is, of course, surprising that the king believed such a story, but it must be remembered that the potentates of those days were more terrified of poison than of anything else, for medical science was scarcely in its infancy, and no one knew how to detect the presence of a poison, nor how to counteract its effects. Moreover, Abou Sir was so high in the king's favour that there seemed no reason to disbelieve him.

THE king sat there for some time, frowning and tugging at his beard, suddenly to arise at last and declare his intention of going to the Hammam. He had scarcely entered the building in which the baths were situated before Abou Kir appeared.

"Welcome, O king!" he cried, after having knelt and knocked his head on the marble floor three times which was the customary way of greeting a king at that time. "You come at a good time."

"Why so?" enquired the king, suspiciously.

"Because I have just prepared a special and most refreshing cream with which to anoint the skin after the bath. You, O king, shall be the first to use it."

"Will I, indeed, you scoundrel?" cried the king. "I have heard about this famous cream of yours. It is no doubt the same as that with which you used to murder the citizens of Alexandria. Happily, however, I have been warned in time, so that you will not poison me with it, you ungrateful knave!"

With that, he called for his guards and Abou Kir was instantly arrested, far too dumbfounded to say a word in his own defence. In any case, it would have been useless. There was no arguing with a king. The unfortunate barber was immediately flung into prison and told that he would be executed within a few days.

This news, of course, delighted the rascally Abou Sir, especially as the king, under the impression that the dyer had saved his life, showered further honours upon him. Meanwhile Abou Kir was confined in a miserable dungeon, from which, as far as he could see, he would only emerge in time to have his head cut off.

"If I can only get out of this," he lamented, "I shall never more put faith in either dyers or kings. They both appear to me to be equally untrustworthy." There was, however, no possibility of escape. All he could do was sit in his cell waiting for the inevitable end.

Meanwhile, something rather unpleasant had happened to Abou Sir, for, as he rode through the street on a fine horse given to him by the king, he was accosted by a Persian nobleman whose dignity and importance were easily seen by the retinue of servants who followed him.

Seeing Abou Sir, he stopped at once and greeted him.

"Are you not," he said, scrutinising him closely, "the rogue who once had a dyer's shop in Alexandria?"

It was an extremely inconvenient question, for Abou Sir immediately recognised the Persian as the man whose cloth he had stolen. Thinking it was best to put on a bold front on the matter, he said:

"No, I am not that person. In fact, I have never been in Alexandria in my life."

"You lie, you thieving blackguard," cried the Persian, in a rage. "I could pick you out from a thousand. So this is where you have been hiding yourself! No wonder the police in Alexandria have been waiting for you in vain. However, they will not need to wait much longer."

WITH that, ordering his men to get a move on, he went straight to the king's palace and lodged a complaint.

"There is a man named Abou Sir in this city," he said, "who formerly had a dyer's shop in Alexandria, where his name became a by-word for knavery. He robbed me of five hundred lengths of silk, but before he could be arrested, he fled from the city. Now I have found him here, and I demand justice."

The king immediately sent for Abou Sir, who came trembling, for he realised that he was in a nasty predicament.

"Do you still deny," asked the Persian, "that you were once in Alexandria."

"I do," declared the frightened Abou Sir. "I have never seen the place."

"But how is this?" demanded the king. "Two days ago you told me that you had once a dyer's shop there, next to Abou Kir, the barber. It seems to me that you are a man for whom the truth has no meaning."

"That is right," agreed the Persian. "His shop stood beside that of Abou Kir, who was as honest a fellow as ever breathed."

"In that case," said the king, "I have made a terrible mistake, for I have sentenced that same Abou Kir to death on the word of this man."

"Then you did wrong, O King," said the Persian, "for if any one deserves to perish, it is undoubtedly this vile dyer. In fact, the police are still looking for him in Alexandria, and if he returns there he will inevitably have his hand cut off, which is the penalty for thieving."

The king ordered Abou Kir to be released at once, and had the dyer executed in his place. He heaped further honours on Abou Kir, but the former barber no longer felt any confidence in him, and as soon as he had made enough money he sold the Hammam and returned to Egypt where he built a fine house on the shores of a bay at the mouth of the Nile, near Alexandria, and there he lived in retirement for many years—for so long, in fact, that the bay eventually was called after him and is shown on the map as Aboukir Bay to this day. It was in Aboukir Bay that Admiral Lord Nelson defeated the French Fleet in 1798, in the battle that is known to history as the Battle of the Nile.

PASTIMES

TRICKS

All you need to solve these tricks is a box of matches—and perhaps a little patience!

STRATEGY

During a campaign in the South Pacific Islands, a party of fifty-six soldiers was surprised by a large enemy force. The officer formed the soldiers into a square, with eighteen men on each side of the square.

After some desperate fighting, eight soldiers became casualties, so the officer rearranged the square with his remaining forty-eight men, but still kept eighteen on each of the four sides of the square.

Later on, eight more soldiers fell out of the fighting and, once more, the officer rearranged his men. This time, he carried on with forty, but still kept to the eighteen on each side. Now, how did he do it?

It is very clear that he did not spread his men equally along the sides. What he did was to have a group at each corner and another group in the middle of each side.

Just make a square with dead matches, then take fifty-six live ones and see how he arranged the eighteen to a side. And, having done that, reduce the number of matches to forty-eight and then to forty.

THE ARAB AND HIS STEEDS

There was once an Arab who had nineteen steeds and three sons. Of course, a steed is what an Arab always calls a horse. Now the Arab was on the point of death and he sent for his three sons. He told them all sorts of things, but what we are concerned with here is the way he directed them to share out his steeds when he was dead.

His eldest son was to have a half of them; his middle son was to take a quarter of them, and his youngest son was to have a fifth: but no steeds were to be slaughtered in order to effect a division.

Now, even a professor of mathematics knows that you cannot divide nineteen horses by two without doing something drastic, let alone divide them into a quarter and a fifth. So when the sons were actually engaged in the division they were puzzled.

As always happens on such occasions, a man whom they knew to be wise came riding up on a steed of his own. They told him of their dilemma.

The wise man, without hesitating a moment, slipped out of his saddle and put his steed with the nineteen, making twenty in all. Then, he gave the eldest son ten horses; the next son was given five, and the youngest son was told to take four. That done, there was one steed left. The wise man mounted it, for it was his own animal, and rode off, leaving three happy lads behind.

Now, take nineteen matches to represent the old man's horses and put an extra match with them to serve as the one belonging to the wise man. Then, see if you can discover how the division became possible.

By using concrete things and not trying to figure it out on paper, you will quickly see the answer. What is the explanation?

SIX SQUARES

Sometimes it is just as much trouble to use all the matches allotted to a problem as to have too few to do the job. Here is a puzzle which is difficult because it is not easy to find a place for all the matches.

You are allowed twenty matches and you are required to fit five squares inside a larger square. The whole six squares must be formed by the twenty matches and there may not be any over.

SOLUTIONS

STRATEGY

Here are the three formations:

56 Men			48 Men			40 Men		
4	10	4	6	6	6	8	2	8
10		10	6		6	2		2
4	10	4	6	6	6	8	2	8

THE ARAB AND HIS STEEDS

The division was made possible by the wise man because the fractions mentioned by the father did not amount to a whole number. There was something left over which, when added to the wise man's horse, enabled the division to be effected in terms of complete horses.

SIX SQUARES

First, make a square, using three matches to form each side. This disposes of twelve out of the twenty. Then construct a square in the centre of the larger square, using one match per side. Four more matches are used. Now choose either pair of diagonal corners of the small square and produce the two sides at each of these corners until they reach the sides of the larger square. To do this you will have to make four lines, each supplied by a single match. You have now used all the matches and, in doing so, have constructed three small squares and two larger ones, all within the larger square, as required.

Between You and Me

DEAR GIRLS AND BOYS,

This month's mail brought a most interesting letter from Pamela Snell. She said:

"Do you remember the story about the Blue Wrens which I wrote and which was printed in the Journal Juniors' section? Well a lady in England wrote me a very pleasant letter telling me how she had enjoyed reading it. She also told me about some of the English birds and their habits. Our 'Australian Journal' certainly does travel, doesn't it?"

The very next letter to Pamela's was from a young lad who lived in Arabia, so you can all see just how extensively the Journal does travel!

I suppose many of our country Juniors are still very busy helping their parents to combat the aftermath of the floods. They were really terrible this year, and the three eastern states all suffered.

Sylvia has been watching your letters with great excitement, thinking she might read about some of your experiences during the floods. She said she would just love to be rescued from a great lake by a helicopter. However, I think she would find it most uncomfortable, really.

The entries in the painting competition were extremely good. I wish I could have given you all prizes and marks, but that was impossible, of course.

With best wishes,
Yours affectionately, *Jennifer*

RIDDLES

When is an egg stolen. (When it is poached.)
What can be iced when it is hot. (A cake.)
Why did the fly, fly? (Because the spider spied her.)
(Two marks to **Beryl Troyahn**, 7, Nth. Coast Rd., Woody Point, Q'ld.)

What is it that we sometimes wish for, yet when we get it we never know we have it? (Sleep.)
Why is an egg like a colt? (Because it is not fit for use until it is broken.)
(Two marks to **Bernice Jackson**, 13, Moore St., Colac, Vic.)

What has a head but cannot think? (A match.)
What hangs on the wall and yet falls? (A barometer.)
(Three marks to **Nancy Williams**, 14, 15 Palmerston St., Ararat, Vic.)

What fish is most valued by a married lady? (Herring [her-ring].)
Why is a banana skin like a jersey? (Because it is easy to slip on.)
(Three marks to **Kay McLennan**, 9, Barramunga, Vic.)

What word of six letters contains six words, besides itself, without transporting a letter? (Herein—he, her, here, ere, in, rein.)
What is the difference between a duck with one wing and a duck with two wings? (Just a matter of opinion [a pinion].)
(Two marks to **Geoffrey Monteith**, 10, Mondure, Q'ld.)

MY HORSE

My father bought Flight for me when he was in Perth. She is brown with a black mane and tail. She came down by rail and we took her out to our farm at Boyanup. She was not broken in so Dad halter broke her in. When she was quiet enough to lead, a friend broke her in for us. When she came back she was nervous but quiet. Later we moved into Bunbury as we had leased the farm. Two of our horses are still at our farm, Flight is in town and one is about ten miles away.

(Three marks to **Hazel Renfree**, 13, 31 Forrest Ave., Bunbury, W.A.)

DO YOU KNOW?

Have you ever wondered why soldiers salute? The salute was started in the Middle Ages. In those days the knights often had contests to test their skill in using the spear and lance. At these contests a lady was chosen to be queen and to give out the prizes. When the knights went up to her throne for their prizes they shielded their eyes with their hands, as though her beauty dazzled them. This became a token of respect and has now come into general use.

(Three marks to **Marlene Skinner**, 11, Price St., Nambour, Q'ld.)

THE PRIZE LETTER

DEAR JENNIFER,

I would like to tell you about my two hobbies. One is making novel "paste-in" books and the other is collecting strangely shaped leaves.

Making "paste-in" books may seem childish, but it is really very interestng. The books I make I call the Rainbow series. First I get a crayon drawing book and tear off the cover, then on the first page I draw a rainbow, merging the colours of the rainbow. Around the edge of the rainbow I draw the name, "Rainbow Book of Flowers," and inside it I write my own name. Of course all my books are not of flowers. I have one of fruit and also one of funny faces which cheers me up when I'm feeling blue. I paint the names of the fruit, etc., and the number of the page they are on. This pastime takes many of my leisure moments and the books look very pretty when finished.

The second hobby, leaf collecting, is intriguing and I find quite a few unusual leaves. To preserve the leaves I press them and then paste them on stiff cardboard.

One leaf I had was a very small, but almost perfect replica of Australia itself. Across the flats from my home are many and varied species of wild plants, so I have a wide range of leaves to pick from. The largest four-leaf clover I ever found measured four inches across.

I have now a Scarlet Snowball leaf which is shaped like a baby's bonnet, but it cannot be pressed or it would lose its shape.

When my collection is large enough I will combine my two hobbies and make a book called the "Rainbow Book of Leaves." This will also prevent the leaves from being destroyed.

Affectionately yours,
KATHLEEN MURPHY (14).
East Carnarvon, W.A.

RHYMES FROM READERS

A NEW DAY IS BORN

A sudden calm steals o'er the sea
And the world is filled with mystery;
The trees stand waiting on the hill,
And even the wind in the old windmill
Pauses, and waits expectantly
Along with the trees, and the whispering sea.

The flowers and birds and animals too,
From the tiniest mouse to the giant kangaroo
Have awoken from sleeping the livelong night,
To watch and to wait in the dim grey light;
All of a sudden the night disappears,
And with it there goes all doubts and all fears.

The jackass, he laughs with the greatest of joy,
The sun says "good morning" to each girl and boy;
The dingo goes home to his mate and his lair,
While the birds' joyous chorus rings through the air;
The wind stirs the treetops, and you'll hear him say,
"'Tis morning already, and a beautiful day!"

The waves of the sea are quite frisky again,
There's a cloud in the sky, but there's no sign of rain,
And the little bush mouse and the giant kangaroo
Are happily eating the grass fresh with dew.
Why are they all happy so early this morn?
Why! it is simple; a new day is born!

(Ten marks to **Janice Pearce**, 15, 8 Margaret St., Beulah Park, S.A.)

SPOOKS!

A knock on the door, who can it be?
For there's nobody home but me, you see.
I creep to the door and open it wide,
But there's nobody there, but the wind outside.
So back I creep to my chair and book,
Then out of the window I chance to look,
And, horror of horrors, what do I see,
But a ghostly white face peering up at me.
My heart gives a turn, I shake and I quiver,
My stomach's all mushy, tied up with my liver,
And then, what next but a "whoo" fills the air,
I sneak a look out, then flop down on the chair,
For what do I see looking out on the night,
But a sleepy old owl with a face ghostly white!

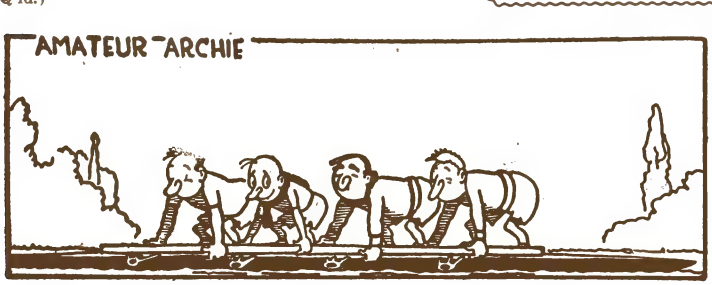
(Six marks to **Pam McAuliffe**, 7 Arthur St., Medindie, S.A.)

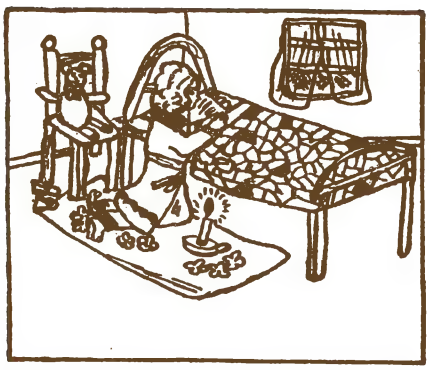
A FAITHFUL CAT

One afternoon when my friend and I were coming home from the beach we saw a cat which we thought was dead. When we came closer we noticed that the cat was alive but that it had a broken leg. My friend picked the cat up and, seeing no owner, took the cat home. He looked after it and its leg healed, but the pussy still walked with a limp.

My friend is living in a rented house and the landlord does not like cats, so he took it away. He left it about fifteen miles from my friend's house but after five days the cat limped back, so my friend kept it.

(Three marks to **John Troyahn**, 11, North Coast Rd., Woody Point Q'ld.)





This original drawing, "Bed Time," earns ten marks for Catherine Powell, Canonbar Station Miowera, N.S.W.

LET'S LAUGH

A little boy came running home from school and said: "Mummy, my teacher loves me."

"That's very nice," said his mother, "but how do you know?"

"Well," said Tommy, "this morning when teacher handed me back my sums, they were covered with kisses."

An Irish soldier was doubtful as to whether he had given out rifles to all the men. To make sure, he shouted: "All of ye that are without arms hold up your hands."

(Two marks to **Bernice Jackson**, 13, Moore St., Colac, Vic.)

Husband: Who was that you were talking to at the door for nearly an hour and a half?

Wife: Oh, that was Mrs. Smith. She hadn't time to come in!

Johnny: What are those holes in the boards for?

Dad: They're knot holes.

Johnny: Well, if they're not holes, what are they?

(Two marks to **Nancy Williams**, 14, 15 Palmerston St., Ararat, Vic.)

Son: Father, why have pictures got frames?

Father, Stupid fellow, so that the painters can tell where to stop.

(Two marks to **Alice Cail**, 10, "Mallee Crest," Wubin, W.A.)

"Why are you crying, little man?"

"They are having apple tart and cream for dinner at home to-day."

"But that should not make you cry!"

"But—boo-hoo—I don't know where home is."

(Two marks to **Alex Bate**, 10, 6 Shaft St., Lithgow., N.S.W.)

Prisoner: Warder, I have a complaint to make.

Warder: What is it?

Prisoner: The walls are not made to scale.

Mother: Why didn't you set a knife and fork for your uncle, Jenny?

Jenny: Because you said he eats like a horse.

(Two marks to **Alison Millard**, 15, 246 Timor St., Warrnambool, Vic.)

Tramp: Could you spare me something to eat, ma'am?

Lady: I'll call my husband.

Tramp: Hold it, ma'am. I'm no cannibal.

Clown: What? A little fellow like you a lion-tamer!

Lion-tamer: Yes, that's the secret of my success. The lions are waiting for me to grow up.

(Three marks to **Suzanne Douglas**, 10, Flaggy Rock, N.C. Line, Q'ld.)

Sally: Mother, are all fleas white?

Mother: No, dear, fleas are black.

Sally: How can they be? Don't you remember Mary's Little Lamb? The poem says: "It's *fleas* was white as snow!"

(Two marks to **Louise Field**, 13, Crockers St., Railton, Tas.)

COMPETITION SPOT.

SENIORS (Twelve and Over)

The answers to these clues are names of well-known flowers.

1. A dairy farm product and a drinking vessel.
2. Numbers of sheep.
3. Not sweet and a vegetable.
4. Foundation for soups.

(Two marks to **Aynsley Underwood** for this suggestion.)

JUNIORS (Under Twelve)

There is a girl's name contained in each of these four sentences. See if you can find them.

1. Some people do risk their lives for others.
2. Rub your hands and make them warm.
3. No lace looks more beautiful than this.
4. He lent me his knife.

(Two marks to **May Carlton** for this idea.)

Send entries together with name, age and address to "Jennifer," P.O. Box 2809 AA, Melbourne. Cash prizes and marks will be awarded in both sections.

JUNE RESULTS

PAINTING COMPETITION — SENIORS

Cash prizes awarded to: Mary Burgess, 14, Calico Creek, via Gympie, Q'ld.; **Margaret Richardson**, 14, Golden Grove, S.A.; **Gordon Leo**, 12, c/o. P.O., Cathu, N.C. Line, Q'ld.; **Graeme Knott**, 12, Box 107, Red Cliffs, Vic.; **Judith Day**, 12, 9 Howard St., Oxley, via Brisbane, Q'ld.; **Margaret Scott**, 13, 26 Elston St., Lockleys, S.A.; **June Myatt**, 12, 26 Malvern Grove, Caulfield, Vic.; **Decima Wright**, 12, "Hunter's Springs," via Scone, N.S.W.

Three marks awarded to: Kay French, Mary Trebley, Pamela Snell, Joan Grogan, Nancy Williams, Valerie Payne, Anne Maynard, Betty Tyrell, Graeme McDougall, Jean McGrath, Johann Dennison, Mary Howarth, Margaret Kneal, Freida Stiller, Noreen Bloom, Joyce Granger, Patricia Gaughwin, Kath Cuttriss, Kathleen O'Kane, Beverley Hoffman, Kay Garton, Elaine Skewes, Noela Hughes, Brenda Burrows, Rosemary Letchford, Denis Kunst, Shirley Hutson, Elaine McKenzie.

JUNIORS

Cash prizes awarded to: Wendy Prescott, 11, 16 Barrett Ave. Cessnock, N.S.W.; **Alex Bate**, 10, 6 Shaft St., Lithgow, N.S.W.; **Marie Murphy**, 9, Kooloonong, Vic.; **Daphne Pocock**, 8, Peachester, via Beerwah, N.C. Line, Q'ld. **Carole McGrath**, 8, Kin Kin, via Cooran, Q'ld.; **Bill Layton**, 7, Foote Ave., Buderin, Q'ld.; **Norma Kenney**, 5 Casula Rd., Casula, N.S.W.; **Esmond Muller**, 6, Dasyville, Henty, N.S.W.

Three marks awarded to: Meryl Brown, Margaret Burr, Elaine Hodge, Heather Shaw, Ron Armstrong, Jeanette Masters, Graham Olde, Joan Quinn, Maureen Jones, Margaret Hunt, Donald Johnson, Ted Payne, Sandra Tulloch, Carole West, Alan Neems, Marilyn Tarrant, Anne Penrose, Lucy Cail, Marian Bate, Margaret Scrimshaw, Barney Percivall.

New Members.—Geoffrey O'Callaghan, Mary and Wally Henery, Barbara and Kaye Morrison, Janice May, Therese Sheehan, Norma and Lois Wedekind, Ted Payne, Marlene Hodges James and Jeanette Goodfellow, Lawrence Richards, Margaret Hunt, Barry Frost, Sandra MacKenzie, Lynette Bolt, Colleen Goodfellow, June Kerruish, Michael Kyd, Donald Johnson, Margot Parnett, Margaret Dunne, Esther Scott, Margaret Bowen, Lawrie Wishart, G. Bichnell, Jill Rogers, Jeanette Masters, Tony and Alison Allan, Denis Sainsbury, Beverley Carr, Jennifer Noble, Merridy Partridge, Joan Quinn, Esmond Muller, Patricia Mitchell, Barbara Green, Mary Howarth, Margaret Scrimshaw, Robin Nossiter, Dawn Lees, Nola McKercher, Dorothy Homan, John Webb, Alan Neems, Carmel Reinke, Maureen Starrs, Carole West, Lorice Creber, Delys Armstrong, Carmel Davis, Jillian Ashton, Sandra McKimmie, Susan Chandler, Frances McPhee, Daphne Pocock.

NOTE FOR NEW MEMBERS.

Apply to Jennifer, P.O. Box 2809AA. Melbourne, enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope for Membership Rules and Mark Book.

MY PET DOG

My pet dog's name is Terry. He is a cross between a whippet and a retriever. He is very faithful and can do tricks quite easily. He can catch a rabbit easily and has caught numerous hares and foxes. He loves to ride in a billy cart and an old doll's pram. He will jump upon a drum at my command. I got him when he was three weeks old and he is now five years old. He once caught a kangaroo which had escaped.

(Three marks to **Kevin McDonell**, Lancaster, Vic.)

WHAT AM I?

My first is in horse but not in cow;
My second's in goat and also in sow;
My third is in lamp as well as in light;
My fourth's in fire and also in bright;
My fifth's in dog but not in cat;
My sixth is in ball and also in bat;
My seventh's in yacht but not in boat;
My eighth is in swim but not in float;
My whole is something we all enjoy;
It pleases every girl and boy.

(Answer: Holidays.)

(Four marks to **Louise Field**, 13, Crockers St., Railton, Tas.)

AUTUMN LEAVES

Once I went for a drive with my parents into the beautiful hills right up to Murray Bridge. The poplar trees were turning yellow, and against the brown of the hillsides, they looked lovely. There were also many fruit trees in the orchards, some having red and yellow leaves, and others being a mixture of all colours. There were several Japanese maples in a cluster, and these had leaves of bright crimson.

In one spot, there was a plantation of pine trees, and in front of these was an orchard which contained a great many fruit trees, as well as several tall poplars. This was indeed a lovely sight, with the crimson, orange and green of the fruit trees, and the bright yellow and gold of the poplars standing out against the dark pines. A little further on there was a small pool, overhung by several willow trees. I thought it was the prettiest sight we had seen that day.

But as we were coming down into a valley, I found something even more lovely. By a large pool, shaded by willows, were several large poplars and a huge white "ghost gum." In front of these were several little bushes. All were in autumn tints, and with the sunset's glow reflected on them it looked just like fairyland.

(Five marks to **Janice Pearce**, 15, 8 Margaret St., Beulah Park, S.A.)

THE SERPENTINE FALLS

One of the beauty spots near Perth is the Serpentine Falls, which are from 40 to 50 feet high. The water in the rocks makes a lovely pool. On hot days people of all ages flock to the falls for a swim. Many buses travel from Perth on hot days. Black spaces mark the place where picnickers have lit fires to boil the billy. Although the falls are slowly wearing away, for years to come many will bathe in the cool water.

(Two marks to **Wendy Moulsdale**, 10, Serpentine, W.A.)

HEIRLOOM

In my possession is a gold locket which belonged to my Great-Grandmother. It is over a hundred years old. Great Gran gave it to Grandma and she gave it to me a few years ago. In one side, there is a piece of Great-Grandmother's hair and I hope to get a piece of Grandma's and Mum's, also.

(Three marks to **Delma Dean**, 14, Glastonbury Rd., Gympie, Q'ld.)

Ten marks to Phyllis Kippin, 47 Hampden Rd., Nedlands, W.A., for this sketch.

The Australian Journal PATTERN SERVICE

1059: Being in one piece, this graceful skirt is particularly simple to make, hanging softly in flares, as it is cut on the bias at centre front and back. Four sizes, 24"-30" waist. **Price 2/4.**

1207: Ideal for the young lass at school, this dress is very simple to make. It is finished neatly with contrasting collar and cuffs. Six sizes, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 years. **Price 2/4.**

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1064: Nurses' and office uniforms are most important. This neatly fitting tailored style is cut on princess lines, being in one piece from shoulder to hem, and it should make an appeal even to efficient housewives. Five sizes, 32" - 40" bust. **Price 2/10.**

1252: This frock is specially designed on neat and trim lines. It can be made with either the new cuffed three - quarter sleeve or the long fitted one. Six sizes, 32"-42" bust. **Price 3/4.**

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1153: A neatly fitting shirt which has a yoke at back extending to front. The collar is attached.. Six sizes, 11", 11½", 12", 12½", 13", 13½" neck. **Price 2/1.**

WHEELS DOWN AND LOCKED

(Continued from page 72)

bomber; next, he over-rectified her so that she almost began to climb and threatened at any moment to stall.

In this fashion, alternately diving and checking in a frightening manner, he proceeded towards the ground. At about thirty feet, after a final furious dive, he checked for the last time, and hit the coral surface with a blow which should have burst both tyres. Up she soared again, higher than the tallest jungle trees, veering and banking, and then descended violently on one wheel, feeling as if she would roll over on to her port wing. She leaped up again almost as high as before—down again—thump—up again—down again, while I gazed anxiously ahead to see how much strip was left. However, her hops became shorter and lower, her speed fell off, and finally we wheeled merrily along, dangerously near the jungle on the port side, and, dropping our tail, majestically came to rest with fully ten yards of strip left.

I was rather shaken. It was the worst landing I had ever known McKechnie to make. I did not relish the return landing at Piva, and made a mild resolve that in future Mac would be deprived of my navigational and radio services, too.

AFTER a delicious lunch, we took off for Piva with four passengers — a wounded Jap, a sick soldier, an A.I.F. guard and a medical attendant. The Jap was one who, for some obscure reason, had apparently been landed by submarine some time before on New Georgia, but had been picked up by our men and handed to the Major Commissioner there. The Commissioner took him to his bungalow and, during an interrogation, showed him pictures of bomb damage to Nagoya, the Jap's home town, whereupon the Jap, up till then apparently quite happy in his captivity, clumsily harakiried himself with a piece of rusty hoop iron as soon as he was locked up for the night. He did not die, but from the look of his colourless face and his lack-lustre eyes, he might do so at any moment. The soldier was a neurosis case from the A.I.F. unit at Munda.

When the Yanks left Munda, part of an Australian battalion, which had been continuously in the tropics for over two years, was stationed

there to garrison the place. Their recreations were not varied; they had few visitors; they lived dull, inactive lives; their food was poor; and they were tormented by every form of skin trouble, from itchy spots to tropical ulcers. It was not surprising that one of them had gone troppo, for neurosis seems to develop most readily, not from an active, crowded, dangerous life, but from a stagnant, lonely, dull one. We had carted a few nerve cases from various units to Piva, but this chap was the sickest I had seen. When he was put in the aircraft he did not look about him inquisitively as another soldier might do, but sat staring into space, quoting Wordsworth in a strange, mechanical voice. He showed not the slightest interest when we took off nor when we flew serenely over the placid sea, our shadow running over the shimmering vision of H.M.A.S. *Canberra*, where she lay dead amid the opal-like coral in the low-tide shallows. We skirted the rich, palm-fringed shores of beautiful Santa Ysabel and exquisite New Georgia, but he merely smiled sadly and remained looking inward. Partly because he was so fascinating to watch and partly because he looked so placid that I suspected that he might, at any minute, race over and decapitate me with a hatchet, I could not take my eyes off him the whole way.

Finally, after a most peaceful and uneventful trip, we entered the circuit area at Piva, where I came to myself and braced myself to take the shock of the landing. As he made his circuit and his approach, it was obvious from the cavortings of the Beaufort that McKechnie was about to make a real prang of a landing, and I was sitting very tight when suddenly the tower called urgently in my ear: *"Attention, Australian aircraft about to touch down. Do not land. Go round again, Australian aircraft about to land. You have only one wheel showing. Do not land. Go round again."*

I looked towards the tower to see two red Verey lights go up. The tower's voice drawled urgently on even after McKechnie had given his motors everything they had and lifted his aircraft's nose to the horizontal, and it did not cease its warning monologue until we roared full-throttle low over the metal matting. My first feeling was one of relief that the landing was delayed, but almost immediately the awful significance of the circumstances struck me. If McKechnie made such a mess of landing on two good wheels, how would his aircraft behave on one wheel or on its belly?

He climbed away out of the circuit area, and began to play with his undercarriage, but no matter how many times he retracted it and let it down again, only one leg would operate. With one leg down, he began to dive and pull up suddenly in an effort to force the errant leg from its housing; but it refused to budge. When it was obvious that these tactics were hopeless, he operated the emergency apparatus for forcing down the undercarriage, but still only one leg came down; and this time he could not retract the hanging wheel. The hydraulic system would not operate at all. McKechnie now went into a welter of aerobatics in an attempt to retract the wheel that was down, but nothing happened. So we began to fly round miserably with one leg down which we couldn't get up, and one leg up which we couldn't get down.

MEANWHILE the poor Jap had been held together as comfortably as possible by his attendant during these manoeuvres, and the soldier had gone sound asleep and had been tied in his safety belt by the guard. The two sick men were happily oblivious of our predicament, but the guard and the attendant had some inkling of it and were looking distinctly nervous.

While we stooged around, McKechnie held an animated conversation with base and I dolefully envisaged the dire possibilities. We had two parachutes between the six of us, so jumping was out of the question. A Beaufort's wheels are set wide apart for stability in landing and take-off, and I could not imagine anyone, least of all McKechnie, making a successful landing on one of them. If we could manage to force the hanging leg up, we might make a successful belly-landing, although the best of belly-landings are unpleasant, and, anyhow, I had my doubts about his ability to do it.

Presently, McKechnie decided to try to force the protruding wheel up by bumping it on the ground; and as we came in low towards the strip, I could see that many of the personnel, Australians, New Zealanders and Yanks, were lined up at every road leading on to the strip, some standing, some sitting in all manner of vehicles, all taking time off to see the show.

I felt embarrassed as I realised that I had seen this same crowd before, mustered like vultures from nowhere, when some poor wretch, aloft in the vicinity, was having trouble in getting down. McKechnie flew low along the strip; but as soon as he passed the metal he touched his wheel twice on the coral very expertly; and I breathed a sigh of relief, but the wheel was as solid as a rock, locked firmly down.

Then began a doleful period of flying about, trying everything that anybody at base could think of, up high, down low, or in between. All the great brains around were busy at work, we were repeatedly assured that we could count on that. But no suggestion proved helpful.

One leg was up, and one was down; and neither would budge. Meanwhile, we were using up our petrol, which was all to the good if we were to make a belly-landing; but a time finally arrived, as the afternoon wore into evening, when our petrol supplies were becoming so low that we had to do something. By this time we were numb with nervous strain and it was almost a relief to hear McKechnie announce his suicidal intention of attempting to land on one wheel.

THE guard, the attendant and myself began to make thorough preparations for the great event. We lashed the Jap's stretcher to the aircraft, installed the army man behind a spar; then we made ourselves as comfortable as possible. When I returned to the Wop's seat after having opened some of the hatches, McKechnie, for the first and last time in my hearing, made a disparaging remark about his airmanship.

"Bert," he said, "I knew I bumped them in rather badly at times; but I didn't think I'd live to see the day I'd bump one of my legs right off. Don't you think I should gracefully retire?"

"If the grim reaper doesn't beat you to it," I thought, and, as I settled back to await events, I had a faint suspicion that my minutes were numbered.

"Bert," he said again, "I'm going to take off my phones as soon as we run on to the cross-wind leg. I'd like to have every sense as alert as possible."

As we passed near the emergency strip on our final circuit I could see a whole fleet of crash wagons alertly lined up and I imagined I could hear their motors tensely idling. This time they were not there on spec., simply because it was McKechnie; they knew that something was going to happen, without a doubt. So did the great throng of spectators, who seemed to number more than would attend an air pageant at Richmond.

As we turned on to the approach I craned my neck round to look at McKechnie's back. He seemed to be going about his task very calmly, but perspiration glistened on his violet-painted neck and his red-tinctured forearms, and his skin looked even whiter than usual. I suddenly realised how heavy a burden he bore, and, as I saw that he seemed to carry it pretty well, I reflected that in making him a pilot the R.A.A.F. had not made such a great mistake after all.

Apparently he was concentrating exceptionally well, for the descent he made was a lesson in efficiency. We nosed down along the airstrip matting, and all too soon I saw we were about to cross on to the coral emergency strip, and certain crash wagons were already moving off to follow the mad career we would begin as soon as we struck. And at this instant, the tower, which had not addressed us for some time, suddenly broke in on my tense ear:

"Beaufort, your port leg has come down! Beaufort, your port leg has come down!"

McKechnie had no phones on, and naturally did not hear it, and it was too late to let him know. In a horizontal attitude, we were just skimming the hard-pressed coral surface. We were about to touch, and I would probably never reach him in time; but in the event of a prang, would be first out through the skylight. I just sat tight, and hoped that the wheel had indeed come down, and locked, too.

It certainly had, and the dumbfounded McKechnie proceeded to execute the most perfect landing he had ever made in his life. With the ambulances and fire-tenders screaming along behind us, we hit that strip without the semblance of a bump, and our wheels ran smoothly along as if glued to rails on the coral. We came to rest with those ministering ghouls clustered disappointedly about us; and McKechnie, smiling happily for once, majestically waved them off, regally waited until they had made way and then taxied back to our area between the great crowds of would-be sightseers.

He made no more flights in the unit, for a few days later the doctor ordered him south for the benefit of his dermatitis. ●

IN PASSING

(Continued from page 3)

mostly are, in the musty files of "Household Words," and other long-dead periodicals to which the great novelist contributed. The same thing applies to many another noted writer of yesteryear. We got to work, however, and after a few trial bores here and there at length struck oil.

As a result, on page 49 you will find a story called "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," a moving tale of frontier life by Bret Harte, one of the first of the great American short story writers. If by some chance you happen to have read it before, you will be pleased to renew acquaintance with it; if not, you will find it as fresh as on the day it was completed, many years ago.

Each month, in addition to our ordinary list of stories, we intend to publish one of the gems from the past under the heading of "Classic of the Month." But don't let that word "Classic" scare you off. After all, nothing, either in music or literature becomes a classic until it has stood the test of the years, and if it does that, you can be sure it has outstanding qualities.

Off-the-Track Stories.

How do you like Dale Collins' new stories? We'd be glad to know because, unless an Editor has second-sight—and what a rare gift that is, alas!—he can never tell exactly what sort of reception will be given to any new feature. Still our hopes are far astray if these tales do not appeal to at least eighty per cent of readers, which is as much as the greatest optimist can expect. If you think the percentage should be higher, look at it this way. Suppose you have just read a book which you liked very much. If you lent it to ten friends would you expect more than eight of them to be as enthusiastic about it as you are yourself?

We pride ourselves on the fact that this magazine contains stories of a type you don't read anywhere else, and we're always anxious to learn the result of our experiments. If you like out-of-the-common yarns like these and the Sanders tales, let us know.

There are always three people vitally concerned with every story. There is the author whose work it is. Not only will its popularity benefit him financially, but what is almost as important—it will give him deep personal satisfaction. There is the editor who has shown sufficient faith in the story to publish it, and there is the reader who, both author and editor hope, has enjoyed it. If, in breaking new ground, author and editor have succeeded, it is always encouraging to hear about it.

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Mainly for Contributors

D.Y.: "His father promised to give Barry ten thousand pounds if he gave up his bad habits . . ."—But if he did that, he'd have nothing to spend the money on. **B.J.:** "There are two essentials for success in the world — honesty and shrewdness. Honesty means always, under any circumstances, to keep your word . . ."—And shrewdness means never to give it. **S.F.:** "She was determined that she would count in the world . . ."—Should have been a cashier.

P.H.: "The baby was expected at Easter, but he did not arrive until the first of the following month . . ."—Was that why they called him 'Bill'? **H.T.O.:** "Milton Verne was no good. He never had been any good, and he never would be any good . . ."—A pity his mother didn't throw him away and keep the stork. **R.E.A.:** "You can preserve almost anything in alcohol . . ."—Except a secret.

L.A.T.: "'My husband,' said Mrs. Arnold, 'is a brilliant man. He knows everything' . . ."—He probably didn't even suspect anything. **H.V.I.:** "When Bob was twenty, he made up his mind to become rich . . ."—So did we, but we found it easier to change our mind. **L.M.:** "'You're a blinking idiot,' said Treves. 'You'd better see a lawyer' . . ."—If he was a blinking idiot, it would be better to see an oculist.

K.C.: "As he drew near, the distressed one cried out in trembling accents, 'Pray, sir, be careful. It was lying just across the path.' 'Dear lady, what has alarmed you?' 'A large snake! Oh, how it darted its horrid tongue at me!' 'The cause of your alarm must have decamped for it is nowhere visible. It will not be a serious obstacle to your walk' . . ."—There may be people who talk like that, but we haven't met them.

G.H.: "Matunga was probably the healthiest place in Australia . . ."—Don't know about that. We know a little township in North Queensland that is so healthy they had to shoot a politician in order to start a cemetery. **H.M.:** "When his wife told him to go out and look for a job, it was a case of have to . . ."—Either that, or look for a new wife. **S.T.:** "At midnight a ghost appeared. It came right through the wall just as if there had been no wall there at all . . ."—If we'd been in that room, we'd have departed through the opposite wall the same way.

C.W.: "'I used up nearly a bottle of sal volatile, but as she was no better I got a bottle of whisky they kept for snake bite, for, says I, if it's good for snake bite, it's good for snake fright.

'After a couple of good glasses, Mary slept the sleep of pure fatague.

'Ah,' concluded Mrs. O'Brien, 'them was the days of inventure, what with snakes, possums and other wild animals and blacks in a state of nudicy, breaking in when you was all alone with your husband and children, there was plenty of exzitement in the bush in them days' . . ."—It certainly sounds like it!

R.A.D.: "Joan had once been considered quite a beauty . . ."—That would be before her father lost his money. **B.T.:** "That same night the countess had a terrific fight with her husband . . ."—Did she retain the title? **N.O.:** No good writing stories about the alleged "downtrodden" class. The only downtrodden people we know are those with aisle seats at the pictures, and even they have their ups and downs.

R.N.: "He had always declared that he'd never be a widow's second husband . . ."—A shade better, though, than being her first. **M.A.:** "'Obviously,' said Detective Percival, studying the body closely, 'these marks on his nose were made by glasses' . . ."—How many glasses? **R.A.:** "The old man had a remarkable face. On it could be read courage, kindness, fortitude, strength and resignation . . ."—That's reading between the lines!

"Don't be scared, dear. That's only Melville getting in the mood for his next horror story."

D.C.: "In order to reduce, she started bending and stretching for half an hour every day . . ."—We knew a fat man who went up for a four-year stretch, but it didn't seem to help much. **N.D.:** "It was hard to tell what to do with Bella after she left school. She was always at the foot of her class . . ."—Should have made her a chiropodist. **L.G.:** "Hilton returned from India with a cedar chest . . ."—We know a man who came back from Alaska with a cork arm.

N.D.: "Didst ever find, when overwrought,
And tempted to despair,
Some consolation in the thought
That all this weight of care,
This heavy strain of woe and pain,
That wrings the heart and brow,
Will have passed away like a wreath of spray,
A hundred years from now?"

—We think of it continually. It's the only think that keeps us going.

N.D.: "Going out next morning, Linda was horrified to see Paul's dead body swinging from a tree. He had committed suicide . . ."—Naturally she didn't want a man like that hanging around. **R.F.:** "Herbert had been a marvellous horseman all his life. He was never so much at home as when he was in the saddle . . ."—Even when he died, no doubt he rode as if he was part of the hearse.

C.E.: "The theatre management was always looking for new faces . . ."—Ours wouldn't be any good to them. We've had it too long. **N.K.:** "When Jasmine looked into his eyes, time stood still . . ."—He must have had the kind of face that will stop a clock. **W.A.:** "'I tell you,' cried Anderson, 'that all men are equal. They all come out of the same mould' . . ."—Though, of course, some are mouldier than others. **C.E.:** "Like most business men, he had a drawn look . . ."—Perhaps it was an overdrawn look.

M.A.: "Jasper Wright was a man of stone. He had a granite face and a heart like rock . . ."—Probably he'd never been born, but just quarried. **K.C.:** "He always carried his money loose . . ."—Lucky man. It's always tight with us. **W.T.:** "Wimpole decided to start a small sausage factory . . ."—Let's hope he made both ends meat.

K.N.: "Mr. Harvey had a cold. He didn't know whether to feed it or starve it . . ."—Some men just flood it. **C.T.:** "He had started out to become a surgeon, but had to give it up . . ."—Too much inside work, probably. **M.A.L.:** "Dulcie had Spanish blood in her . . ."—By inheritance or transfusion?

O.D.: "When a girl looked at Harold, she just naturally smiled . . ."—Fortunate man! When they look at us, they laugh out loud. **L.A.:** "At two in the morning, the police patrol picked him up and took him to the lock-up . . ."—No wonder he had a pinched look in the morning. **S.O.:** "Higgins was so fat that his stomach was like a beer keg . . ."—Doubtless that was what he used it for. **L.S.:** "Doris was beautiful. She had a skin like a peach, her cheeks were like rosy apples, and her lips like cherries . . ."—She sounds rather like a fruit salad.

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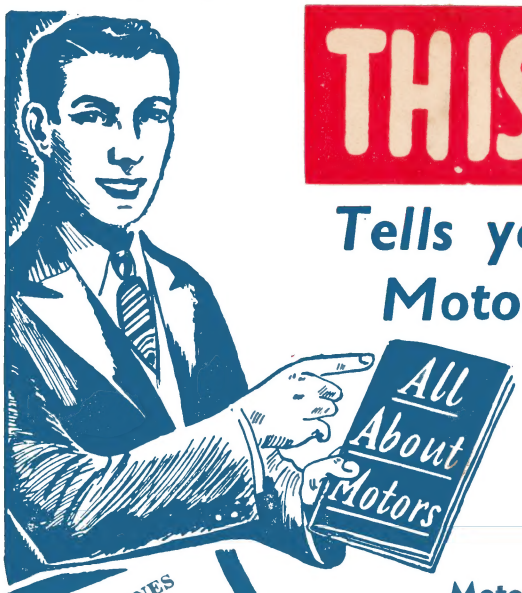

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A.J.852

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